NATION

Wrong employments: Delhi LG sacks 223 DCW workers

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BUSINESS

'Tax concessions not presumptive loss'

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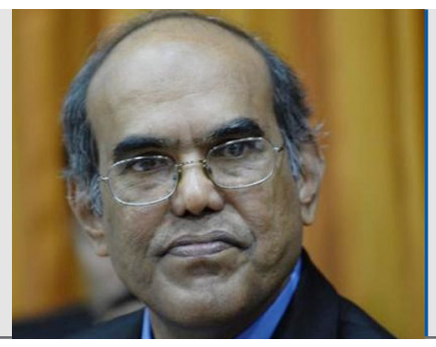

SPORTS

Leg 1: Fullkrug earns Dortmund 1-0 win

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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BENGALURU'S FORECAST

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Pak is crying because Cong is dying: PM

Modi calls Cong Pak's 'disciple'; says neighbour wants 'shehzada' Rahul as Indian PM

ANAND, 2 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday dubbed Congress a "disciple" of Pakistan. He also targeted Rahul Gandhi saying the neighbouring country was eager to make the 'shehzada' of the grand old party India's next prime minister.

Addressing a mega election rally in Anand of central Gujarat in support of BJP's candidates for Anand and Kheda, he also alleged that Congress wants to change India's Constitution to provide reservation of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Classes (OBC) to Muslims.

Modi's comments linking Congress with Pakistan came a day after Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, a former minister in Imran Khan's cabinet in Pakistan, reportedly shared a video featuring Rahul Gandhi on his social media handle and praised him.

"Pakistan is crying because Congress is dying here. This is not surprising because we already know that Congress is Pakistan's 'murid' (follower)" he said.

"The partnership between Pakistan and Congress has now been exposed completely. It shows that the country's enemies want a weak government in India, not a strong one...A weak government which was there at the time of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. They want a corrupt government which was there before 2014," the PM added.

Unlike in the past when Congress was in power, the "tyres of Pakistan's terror have got punctured" now, he said. "A country which used to export terror in the past, is now struggling to import 'atta' (flour). The hands which used to hold bombs are now holding 'bheekh ka katora' (begging bowl)," he said.

People across the world are now saying that India is a global bright spot. India is seen as 'vishwa bandhu' (global friend) who can resolve conflicts between two countries, Modi said.

Modi also challenged Congress and the INDIA bloc to give in writing that it won't give reservation to Muslims "through backdoor by reducing OBC quota" in the states where the party and its allies are in power.

"I am challenging the shehzada to give this guarantee. There is no sense in taking the copy of the Constitution on the head and dancing. If you want to learn how to live for the Constitution and die for it, then come to Modi," the PM added.

Modi also took a dig at the grand old party over opposition leader Salman Khurshid's niece Maria Alam's call for 'vote jihad'. —*PTI*

Narendra Modi waves at supporters during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Anand, on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP complains to EC against Cong over 'lies'

BJP on Thursday lodged a complaint with Election Commission against Congress, alleging that it is trying to create an "atmosphere of tension" in society and spreading lies that the Constitution will be changed. Opposition parties have been alleging that the BJP is seeking more than 400 seats in the Lok Sabha elections as it wants to change the Constitution and end quotas for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi and party leader Om Pathak approached the commission with the complaint.

India protests against China building infra in PoK valley

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

India has lodged a strong protest with China for carrying out construction activities in the Shaksgam valley, in an "illegal" attempt to alter the situation on the ground.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Thursday that the Shaksgam valley is a part of India and New Delhi never accepted the so-called China-Pakistan boundary pact of 1963 through which Islamabad "unlawfully" attempted to cede the area to Beijing.

The Shaksgam valley is a strategically key region that is part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Meanwhile, India is "watchful" of the presence of a Chinese vessel in the Maldives and taking "appropriate measures" to safeguard its national and economic security, MEA said. Chinese marine research vessel Xiang Yang Hong 3 returned to Maldivian waters, marking its second visit to the archipelago nation within two months. The vessel was observed docked at the Thilafushi industrial island's harbour, although the specific reason for its return remains undisclosed.

Biden calls India 'xenophobic'

US President Joe Biden has called two of his QUAD partners – India and Japan – and two of his adversaries – Russia and China – "xenophobic" nations, asserting that none of these countries, unlike the United States, welcome immigrants. .—*ANI*

Shaksgam valley is a strategically key region that is part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: PTI

Man stabs wife to death in Koramangala

BENGALURU, 2 MAY

A woman was allegedly stabbed by her husband on a busy road in Koramangala at 3.30pm on Thursday. The incident took place at 6th Block, which is a stone's throw away from Koramangala police station. Police attributed the murder to a marital dispute. The deceased, Indu, and accused, Selvin Francis, had been living separately for six months. On Thursday, Indu lodged a police complaint against Francis for creating a ruckus at her workplace. According to sources, she was at the police station when the cops called her husband to warn him. The police told Francis to stop harassing his wife. After this, Indu was leaving the police station when suddenly Francis stabbed her with a knife, killing her on the spot. Police have launched a hunt for Francis, who fled the scene. —*Salar News*

CBI not under our control: Centre to SC

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

CBI is not under the "control" of the Union, the Centre on Thursday told Supreme Court. This was while raising preliminary objections on a lawsuit filed by West Bengal government on the agency going ahead with its probe in several cases without the prerequisite nod from the state.

West Bengal filed an original suit in the apex court against the Centre under Article 131, alleging that CBI has been filing FIRs and proceeding with investigation, despite the state having withdrawn the general consent to the federal agency to probe cases within its territorial jurisdiction.

Article 131 deals with Supreme Court's original jurisdiction in a dispute between the Centre and one or more states.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told a bench of Justices BR Gavai and Sandeep Mehta that Article 131 is "one of the most sacred" jurisdiction and this provision can't be misused and abused.

He said the cases referred to in the state's suit have not been filed by the Union of India.

On 16 November, 2018, West Bengal withdrew the "general consent" accorded to CBI to conduct a probe or carry out raids in the state. —*PTI*

Supreme Court of India **PHOTO: PTI**

DRIVER GOES MISSING

Lookout notice against Prajwal

Revanna files for anticipatory bail in B'luru

JD(S) Holenarsipura MLA and former Karnataka minister HD Revanna on Thursday filed anticipatory bail in Bengaluru court. This was after Special Investigation Team (SIT) sent an appearance notice to him in sexual harassment case against him and his son. The court has asked the SIT to file its objections. The Court will hear the matter on 3 May. Speaking to reporters in Bengaluru on Wednesday, Revanna said the SIT has pasted a notice on his house. Noting that he has no clue about the content of the notice, he said he will cooperate with the authorities.

KALABURAGI, 2 MAY

Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara on Thursday said a lookout circular has been issued to arrest Hassan JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna who is facing allegations of sexually abusing women.

On Prajwal seeking seven more days to appear before the Special Investigation Team probing the case as he is abroad, he said there is no provision to grant more than 24 hours. "A lookout notice has been issued soon after it was learnt that Prajwal Revanna has gone abroad. We have informed all the ports and airports about the lookout notice," the minister said here. "Our SIT members are taking legal opinion whether to give time to the accused."

A woman has filed a police complaint accusing Prajwal and his father of sexually harassing her. The Home Minister said one more victim has come forward and lodged a complaint against Prajwal. "The victim's statements have been recorded. In the meantime, one more woman has lodged a complaint, whose details I cannot share," the Minister said.

Prajwal Revanna **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, Karthik Gowda, the former driver of Prajwal who had confessed that he had given the pen drive with the videos of the JD(S) leader sexually abusing women to BJP leader Devaraje Gowda, has disappeared following a SIT notice.

Prajwal travelled to Germany on diplomatic passport: MEA

Prajwal travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and he did not seek political clearance for the trip, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday.

On Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's demand for revocation of Revanna's diplomatic passport, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said such action can be taken only on the directions of a court. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

POLLS FOR 6 MLC POSTS IN K'TAKA ON 3 JUNE

BENGALURU, 2 MAY

The election to six members of legislative council seats in State, which will fall vacant following the retirement of the sitting members, will take place on 3 June.

The counting of votes will happen on 6 June, Election Commission said on Thursday.

These elections pertain to three graduates and three teachers constituencies.

According to a statement issued by the ECI, Chandrashekhar B Patil who was elected from Karnataka North-East Graduates, Ayanuru Manjunatha of South-West Graduates, A Devegowda of Bengaluru Graduates, YA Narayanaswamy of South-East Teachers, SL Bhoje Gowda of South-West Teachers and Marithibbe Gowda of South Teachers are retiring on 21 June.

The notification will be issued on 9 May, the last day for making nominations is 16 May and the withdrawal of candidature is on 20 May.

The poll will take place on 3 June from 8 am to 4 pm.

—*PTI*

AFTER RECORD-BREAKING HEAT

Rain brings smiles to City after sizzling 160 days

BENGALURU, 2 MAY

After enduring a sweltering hot dry spell, Bengaluru residents were granted much-needed relief from the scorching heat as rains descended upon the City after 160 days. The City experienced its driest April in over four decades, coupled with blistering heat that pushed temperatures to above 38 degree Celsius.

On Thursday, the mercury soared to 38.2 degree Celsius. However, clouds quickly filled the sky, followed by lightning and thunder, after which it started drizzling around 6 pm. The drizzle intensified into a heavy downpour. Showers were reported over Eastern and Central Bengaluru, whereas North and South Bengaluru received light rains or drizzles. Indiranagar, Marathahalli, Vijayanagar, CV Raman Nagar, Ramamurthy Nagar, KR Puram, Hoodi, Mahadevapura, Banaswadi, Domlur, Ulsoor, Whitefield, Kalyan Nagar, HBR Layout, Jayanagar, Hebbal, HSR Layout, Vasanth Nagar, and Uttarahalli received a good amount of showers. According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), hot weather was expected to persist for a few days, with rain expected between May 30 and June 3.

Bengaluru residents took to social media to express their relief from the heat. Yashwanth, posted on X, "It rained in Kuppam 2 hours back and it's now drizzling. Sending the clouds towards Bengaluru."

Meanwhile, Pakchikpak Raja Babu drew a parallel between cricket, world affairs, and rain, saying,

- "SRH is playing slow
- Rinku Singh not selected for World Cup
- Goldy Brar is not dead
- It is raining in Bengaluru. Most unexpected week of 2024."

—*Salar News*

Heavy rain lashes Ullal Main Road in Bengaluru on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

TEESTA, SHARJEEL, FARMERS LINKED

'NewsClick's Purkayastha used China funds for riots'

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

Delhi Police told a court that NewsClick Founder and Editor-In-Chief Prabir Purkayastha infused funds from China into India to stoke the 2020 Delhi riots.

Police made the allegations in chargesheet filed before Additional Sessions Judge Hardeep Kaur.

It said the activist Gautam Navlakha's role in the present case was under probe.

The report alleged that Navlakha is a NewsClick shareholder and was the conduits for the finance and supplies of arms for a banned Naxal outfit.

The chargesheet cited statements made by NewsClick human resource head and accused-turned-approver Amit Chakravarty claiming that Purkayastha gave salaries Teesta Setalvad's employees.

It alleged that Purkayastha gave Rs 36 lakh from the funds to Sharjeel Imam for inciting 2020 Delhi riots.

"The funds were also given to SFI activist Anusha Paul and Pawan Kulkarni to create violence during CAA-NRC protests," it alleged.

"Purkayastha also funded the farmer's agitation so that roads get blocked and essential service could be disrupted, which would results in violence in Delhi," the chargesheet added. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

3 dead after cruiser rams into electric pole in Bidar

BIDAR, 2 MAY

Three people died and two others were injured when a cruiser vehicle rammed into an electric pole in Chatnalli near Bidar on Thursday. According to police officers, the deceased are Pradeep Shankar, 25; Vinod Kumar, 26; and Vardish Sharanappa, 25, all natives of Bidar. The victims were going to Telangana for a wedding. The injured are Sanju Kumar, 26, and Manju Kumara, 19. The injured were shifted to Bidar Institute of Medical Sciences (BIMS) after providing first aid at Chatnalli Primary Health Centre. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Ambedkar row: CID to probe mob attack on accused

BENGALURU, 2 MAY

The State government has ordered a Criminal Investigation Department (CID) probe on Thursday after 50 to 60 people attacked the house belonging to the accused who has been facing the charge of desecrating Dr Ambedkar's statue in Kalaburagi on Wednesday. The accused Sangamesh was released on bail on Tuesday in a case related to placing the garland of footwear around Dr Ambedkar's statue on 22 January. The act had sparked widespread outrage, leading to protests by Dalit communities in the area. A group of people attacked the family members after learning that the accused was released. Four members of the family were injured and are hospitalised. Home Minister G Parameshwara condemned attempts to politicise the issue. *—Salar News*

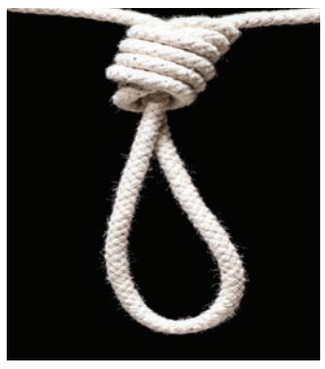
Forest officials rescue leopard from snare trap

MYSURU, 2 MAY

The forest officials in Periyapatna in Mysuru rescued a leopard caught in a snare trap on Thursday. According to officials, the leopard was trapped in a forest plantation in Mallinathapura village. The villagers saw the leopard in the morning and immediately informed the officials. The forest officials rushed to the spot with veterinary officials, tranquillized the leopard, and rescued it from the trap. *—Salar News*

'Hang yourself' not abetment of suicide: HC

The ruling stems from allegations against a man in connection with the death of a priest



BENGALURU, 2 MAY

High Court has declined to categorise the statement "go hang yourself" as abetment of suicide.

Justice M Nagaprasanna addressed the complexity of determining abetment of suicide in cases involving contentious statements.

The recent ruling stemmed from a petition involving allegations of abetment of suicide against a man in connection with the death of a priest in a church in Udupi in coastal Karnataka.

The petitioner was accused of triggering the priest's suicide by allegedly urging him to "go hang himself" during a conversation about the priest's alleged relationship with the petitioner's wife.

The defence counsel argued that the statement was made out of anguish upon discovering the alleged affair, and the priest's decision to end his life was influenced by the affair becoming known to others, rather than solely by the accused's words.

The opposing counsel contended that the priest took his own life due to the accused's threatening language about exposing the affair.

However, the single judge bench, drawing on precedents set by Supreme Court, emphasised that such statements alone might not constitute abetment to suicide. The court acknowledged the multifaceted reasons behind the priest's suicide, including the alleged illicit relationship he had despite his role as a father and priest. Recognising the complexities of human psychology, the court underscored the challenge of deciphering the human mind and declined to categorise the accused's statement as abetment to suicide.

Consequently, the court quashed the case. *—PTI*

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SEX, LIES & PEN DRIVE

Prajwal raped 400 women: Rahul seeks PM's apology

SHIVAMOGGA, 2 MAY

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that Hassan JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna had raped 400 women and made their videos, and sought an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi for soliciting votes for him.

Addressing an election rally here, he targeted Modi and said he should apologise to the women of India for seeking votes for the "mass rapist".

"The Prime Minister supported the mass rapist on the stage in front of Karnataka. He (Modi) told Karnataka that if you voted for this rapist, it will help me," Gandhi alleged and added: "Every woman in Karnataka should know when the Prime Minister was asking for your vote, he was aware of what Prajwal did."

He said every BJP leader was aware that Prajwal is a "mass rapist" and yet they supported him and the party formed an alliance with JD(S). "The PM has insulted every woman of India. The PM, Home Minister Amit Shah and all the BJP leaders should apologise to every woman of the country," he charged, claiming that no leader in the world would have asked for votes for a "mass rapist". "It is news worldwide that the PM solicited votes for a mass rapist. This is BJP's ideology. They are ready to form alliances and do anything for power," Gandhi said. *—PTI*

> **The Prime Minister supported the mass rapist on the stage in front of Karnataka. He (Modi) told Karnataka that if you voted for this rapist, it will help me**
>
> -Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

DKS: We are questioning PM as he campaigned for Prajwal

KALABURAGI, 2 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday said Congress was questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the alleged sex scandal involving JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna as he had campaigned for him in the Lok Sabha elections.

He was responding to State JD(S) President HD Kumaraswamy, who asked why Congress was questioning the Prime Minister.

Shivakumar, also State Congress President, said not a single BJP leader is talking in favour of victims on the Prajwal issue. He said BJP leaders, Deve Gowda and Kumaraswamy, should go to the houses of the victims and console them. "When they say they have respect for women, and when the photographs are there of their party workers (victims), they should meet them. Why aren't they meeting them?" he asked. *—PTI*

Prajwal's brother cries conspiracy against family

HASSAN, 2 MAY

JD(S) MLC Suraj Revanna on Thursday said the scandal and charges of sexual abuse levelled against his brother and Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna was a "conspiracy to weaken their family politically".

Suraj said he has no information about the whereabouts of Prajwal. On an FIR being registered against his father HD Revanna too, he said, "Let them put a thousand more (FIRs), what has to be proved will ultimately get proved. People of our taluk and district know what Revanna is. I don't want to react."

"Anyone can do anything out of political malice. If you take Hassan politics, there is no competitor for Revanna. No one has done politics like him. To weaken him, all these conspiracies are being hatched," he added. Regarding reports of his meeting with Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Suraj said they were mere speculations and that he had met the former in January, and after that, no such meeting had taken place.

Victims refuse to meet SIT

Meanwhile, victims in the videos of the alleged sex scandal involving the MP, are reportedly refusing to come before the SIT which is probing the case. Some of the victims are said to have told the SIT that they don't want to talk to them about the case, while a few are not reachable. *—PTI*

CM lying for political gains, says GT Deve Gowda

MYSURU, 2 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

State JD(S) core committee President and MLA GT Deve Gowda said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's statement that MP Prajwal Revanna's overseas travel was facilitated by former prime minister Deve Gowda and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is utterly false.

Deve Gowda cautioned Siddaramaiah against resorting to falsehoods for political gain. "Should he (Prajwal) be found culpable, we will not hesitate to expel him from the party," he said.

He said the Congress-led State government has full powers to take action against Prajwal. But Congress workers coming to streets is nothing but politics.

—Salar News

KARNATAKA'S SEX SCANDALS

Lingayat seer Shivamurthy Murugha Sharanaru, 2022

On 26 August, 2022, Lingayat pontiff Shivamurthy Murugha Sharanaru was accused of raping two minor girls in Sri Jagadguru Murugharajendra Vidyapeetha in Chitradurga. The doctor in charge said there was no evidence of sexual penetration, and it was reported that the seer was in Mauritius during rape. He was arrested on 2 September, 2022. On 30 April, he was sent to jail after Supreme Court stayed the bail.

Ramesh Jarkiholi, BJP, 2021

On 2 March, 2021, news channels telecast videos of former minister Ramesh Jarkiholi in a compromising position with a woman. The woman alleged that she was promised a job. On 3 March, Jarkiholi resigned and claimed the incident was orchestrated by his rivals.

HY Meti, BJP, 2016

In 2016, former excise minister HY Meti was accused of seeking sexual favours from a woman in exchange for a job transfer. The case was transferred to CID for investigation. However, five months later, the woman recanted her accusations.

SA Ramadas, BJP, 2015

In December 2015, former BJP minister SA Ramadas was accused by an employee of the revenue department of sexually harassing her while promising her a job. Ramadas reportedly attempted suicide. After investigation, Criminal Investigation Department exonerated him.

Raghupathi Bhat, BJP, 2013

In 2013, a CD purportedly depicting BJP MLA Raghupathi Bhat in a compromising situation with women was leaked to media before Assembly elections. He withdrew his candidacy for the election in Udupi, but won 2018 Assembly elections.

Haratalu Halappa, BJP, 2010

Haratalu Halappa, Minister for Food and Civil Supplies Minister in BJP government in 2010, resigned after a video surfaced. Halappa's friend alleged the BJP leader raped his wife. Halappa was acquitted of charges in 2017.

Nithyananda, 2010

In 2010, a video allegedly showing Nithyananda engaging in sexual activities with a woman surfaced. He was arrested on 21 April, 2010, but was granted bail. A US-based woman, who was his disciple, accused him of abuse spanning five years, and a Tamil Nadu-based woman was found dead in his ashram.

RD Kittur, 1973

In 1973, RD Kittur resigned as Minister of State for Home from Devaraj Urs Cabinet after facing allegations of abducting a woman. This incident is noted as one of the earliest cases of a minister resigning due to such accusations.

MLA Raju Kage PHOTO: FB

CONG MLA SAYS WILL CUT POWER, GETS EC NOTICE

BELAGAVI, 2 MAY

Election Commission has issued a notice to Congress MLA Raju Kage, also known as Bharamgouda Alagouda Kage, for his alleged controversial remarks during an election campaign in Madabavi, Belagavi, on 30 April. Kage has been given 24 hours to respond to the notice.

The notice was issued on Thursday following complaints that Kage threatened voters in Madabhavi village with a "power cut" if they did not vote for Congress by a significant margin during the Lok Sabha campaign. "If I don't get more votes this time, I will disconnect your electricity," Kage is heard saying in a purported video of his 30 April speech that has gone viral on social media.

The Assistant Returning Officer of Kagavad Vidhan Sabha constituency sent the notice, indicating a potential violation of Election Code of Conduct.

The Kagwad MLA quit BJP and joined Congress before State Assembly election.

The alleged remarks by Kage have drawn sharp criticism from BJP National spokesperson Shehzad Poonawala, who voiced his outrage on social media, questioning the ethos of the Congress party. He posted on X, "Is the Congress party a 'Mohabbat Ki Dukan' (shop of love), or a 'Dhamki ki Bhaijaan' (brotherhood of threats and hate)?" *—ANI*

BY Vijayendra PHOTO: FB

BJP CONDEMNS 'WHAT IF MODI DIES' REMARK

BENGALURU, 2 MAY

BJP on Thursday slammed senior Congress leaders over party MLA Raju Kage's "what if Modi dies" comment.

"Congress leaders have obtained power over death. It reflects their lowly culture of being restlessly wishing for the demise of great personalities," state BJP President, BY Vijayendra stated.

Attacking the Congress, Vijayendra on Thursday, questioned why Congress was yearning for the death of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He asked, "Is it for repealing Article 370 and integrating Kashmir into the mainstream of the country? For fulfilling the five-century-old dream of Indians by constructing a temple at Lord Ram's birthplace Ayodhya? Is it for saving the country by uprooting terrorism which was bleeding the nation?

"Is it for making India the fifth-largest economy in the world? For bringing India to the forefront in the race for development at the international level? Is it for winning the hearts of people after delivering clean governance through efficient and transparent rule?"

He alleged that the Congress was not able to digest this fact and frustrated leaders were talking ill. *—IANS*

HC denies bail to cops involved in Bitcoin scam

BENGALURU, 2 MAY

High Court refused to grant anticipatory bail to a police inspector and Deputy Superintendent of Police, who are among the Bitcoin scam case accused.

The bail petitions of inspector Chandradhara SR and Deputy Superintendent of Police Shridhar K Pujar, who are accused number three and five in the case were earlier rejected by a sessions court.

Justice Rajendra Badamikar highlighted concerns about manipulation of records and destruction of evidence, given the positions held by the petitioners. He emphasised that the allegations included attempts to destroy evidence, making their bail petitions devoid of merit.

Special Public Prosecutor BN Jagadeesha, representing Crime Investigation Department (CID), argued that the accused officers were involved in the transfer of funds and Bitcoins.The CID also contended that the officers colluded with other accused individuals to destroy evidence and evade legal consequences. The scam had surfaced during the previous BJP regime in 2021, and Congress then in the Opposition had accused the government of trying to cover up the scandal. The prime suspect, Srikrishna Ramesh, was accused of hacking the State's e-procurement site and siphoning off Rs 11.5 crore.

There were also charges of cryptocurrency theft, drug peddling and cyber fraud relating to the case. *—PTI*

NATURE'S NECTAR

Sugarcane juice price shoots up amid heat

BENGALURU, 2 MAY

The rise in sweltering heat across Bengaluru has taken its toll on the sugarcane juice sold along the roadside in the City. The price of a glass (250 ml) of sugarcane juice which was around Rs 15 two weeks ago, is now sold at Rs 25 in parts of the City.

The price of sugarcane juice has gone up in the last two weeks due to the rise in demand and the shortage of sugarcane supply to the City, said M Selvaraj, a sugarcane juice vendor in Frazer Town. There is a shortage of supply of sugarcane to the market from the producers in Mysuru and Mandya. "The producers supply them in large quantities to the sugar mills and what comes to us here in the City is only thinner stalks of the cane. A bundle of 10 stalks of sugarcane, which cost Rs 250 to Rs 300, is now sold for nearly Rs 400 and we have been forced to increase the prices," Selvaraj said.

The price of a glass (250 ml) of sugarcane juice which was around Rs 15 two weeks ago, is now sold at Rs 25 in parts of the City PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD

"The sugarcane juice is a natural coolant. Its extract is deemed as one of the fresher options as the juice is extracted in front of the customer and served in no time without water, making it a safe option to cool off in the summer, said Pratham David, a regular consumer of the cane juice.

Manjunath Gowda, a street vendor in Jayanagar 4th block who has a steady stream of visitors to his shop during the summer, said: "The vendors here in Bengaluru prefer varieties from Mandya, Mysuru and Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu as the sugar cane is mellower and sweeter. We have to maintain the quality and add ginger and a slice of pineapple to make the drink more enjoyable to quench the thirst. We, locals, are facing huge competition from outsiders across the City and getting a spot along the roadside is the biggest challenge for all of us," he said. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: CoWIN WEBSITE

Modi's photo removed from Covid certificate

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

Just days after news broke that Covishield can have severe side effects such as blood clotting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's photo was removed from digital certificates. Modi's photo on the card had created massive furore during some three years ago. The issue led to such a political row that it even reached the Kerala High Court. However, Election Commission of India refused to make any comment on the photo's removal from the certificate and its possible link to Covishield. ECI said Modi's photo was removed as Model Code of Conduct is in place owing to the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. British-Swedish vaccine maker AstraZeneca admitted in a UK court regarding Covishield's potential link to a rare condition involving blood clotting. A majority of the country received doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine (nearly 1.7 billion doses have been administered as data shows). —*PTI*

Ajmer records over 68% voter turnout in repoll

JAIPUR, 2 MAY

Voter turnout of more than 68 per cent was recorded in the repolling held at a booth in Ajmer Lok Sabha constituency from 7 am to 5 pm on Thursday. The Election Commission of India (ECI) had declared the polling held at this booth in the second phase on 26 April void after 17-A register (of voters) got misplaced by the presiding officer. Around 68.66 per cent voters exercised their franchise at the polling booth in Nandasi, Ajmer. Chief Electoral Officer Praveen Gupta said that as per the instructions of the ECI, the repolling was held on Thursday amid tight security arrangements. Out of 753 registered voters at the booth, 517 cast their votes. Rajasthan has 25 Lok Sabha seats.—*PTI*

Sisodia moves Delhi HC for bail in excise policy case

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

AAP leader and former deputy chief minister of Delhi Manish Sisodia moved the Delhi High Court on Thursday challenging the trial court order refusing him bail in the excise policy case being investigated by the Enforcement Directorate and Central Bureau of Investigation. Advocates Rajat Bharadwaj and Mohd Irshad mentioned the matter before the bench led by Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and requested for urgent listing of the matter. Noting the submissions, the bench said, "Let the concerned judge go through the file if your papers are in order by 12.30pm today, we will have it tomorrow."—*ANI*

Congress urges voters to hit NOTA in Indore

INDORE, 2 MAY

The Congress, ejected from the contest after its Indore candidate joined the BJP, is appealing to voters to press the 'None Of The Above' (NOTA) option, a move slammed by the ruling party as negative tactics. Akshay Kanti Bam, who had been pitted against BJP's sitting MP Shankar Lalwani, shocked the grand old party on Monday, which was the last day for withdrawal of nomination, after he pulled out of the race and switched over to the saffron party. The Indore constituency in Madhya Pradesh will go to polls on May 13 in the fourth phase of the general elections."Voters of Indore had delivered a huge victory to the BJP in the last municipal and assembly elections. In spite of it, the saffron party murdered democracy by unfairly luring Bam.—*PTI*

RaGa will start Cong dhoondo yatra: Shah

Shah hits out at INDIA bloc's dynastic politics

BAREILLY/BUDAUN, 2 MAY

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday attacked Rahul Gandhi, suggesting that his party will get such a drubbing in election that he will have to take out a 'Congress Dhoondho Yatra' after 4 June. Addressing an election rally in Bareilly, Shah alleged that Rahul, Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and Samajawadi Party's (SP)Akhilesh Yadav did not attend the Ram Temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya fearing this may alienate their vote bank.

"In the first two phases, Congress is nowhere, while Narendra Modi has made a century and taken a lead in the '400 race' (race to 400 seats)," he said.

He said that this election is for ending terrorism and Naxalism and making India the third major economy globally.

Shah hit out at INDIA bloc partner SP, saying it indulges in dynastic politics, for its President Akhilesh has given tickets to five members of his family in the current election.

He said that while Akhilesh is contesting from Kannauj and his wife Dimple Yadav is in fray from Mainpuri, Akshay Yadav, Aditya Yadav, and Dharmendra Yadav, all three his family members, are contenders from Firozabad, Budaun, and Azamgarh.

"Had he given a ticket to some Yadav youths, it would have been better," he said.

Shah said that for the past 70 years, Congress had been stalling the Ram Temple construction, a task BJP finished.

Shah also claimed that Uttar Pradesh was riven with communal riots till 2017, when Yogi Adityanath came to power, made it riot-free, and stopped residents' exodus from western UP. —*PTI*

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday attacked Rahul Gandhi, suggesting that his party will get a drubbing in election **PHOTO: PTI**

- Shah said that for the past 70 years, Congress had been stalling the Ram Temple construction, a task BJP finished. Shah also claimed that Uttar Pradesh was riven with communal riots till 2017

Our votebank is every Indian: Kharge

Kharge writes his second letter to Modi

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

In a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday said when the elections are over, people will only remember him as the Prime Minister who indulged in "divisive and communal speeches filled with lies" to avoid an inevitable defeat.

Noting that the Prime Minister in his letter to NDA candidates had claimed that reservation will be taken away from SC, ST and OBC and given to the Congress' "votebank", Kharge said, "Our votebank is every Indian -- the poor, the marginalised, the women, the aspirational youth, the labour class, the Dalits and the Adivasis."

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Kharge urged Modi to seek votes on the performance of his government over the last ten years instead of indulging in "hate speeches".

The Congress President's remarks comes days after Modi levelled various charges against his party in his letter to NDA candidates after the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

Prime Minister Modi asked the BJP-led NDA candidates in the Lok Sabha polls to spread awareness among voters about the Congress's intention to snatch "reservation from SC, ST and OBC communities and give it away to their vote bank".

"The letter makes it look like the lies in your speeches are not having the effect you intended and now you want your candidates to amplify your lies. Repeating a lie a thousand times will not make it the truth," he said.

"Our guarantees are so simple and clear, that we don't have to explain it to them. For your benefit, I will reiterate them here," Kharge said in his letter and elaborated on the party's Yuva Nyay, Nari Nyay, Kisan Nyay, Shramik Nyay and Hissedari Nyay. —*PTI*

Congress President Kharge said the promises in the Congress manifesto are simple and clear **PHOTO: PTI**

- In a letter to the Prime Minister, Kharge urged Modi to seek votes on the performance of his government over the last ten years instead of indulging in "hate speeches"

DYNASTIC POLITICS?

BJP drops Brij, fields son from UP's Kaiserganj

KAISERGANJ, 2 MAY

Putting an end to all the speculations around Uttar Pradesh's Kaiserganj seat, BJP on Thursday declared former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's son Karan Bhushan Singh as its candidate from the seat for the Lok Sabha elections.

The Kaiserganj constituency is currently held by BJP's Brij, who is a three-time MP from the seat. He, however, has not been given ticket this time.

The seat had become a point of pondering for BJP after Brij was accused of sexual harassment of female wrestlers.

This sparked massive protests by several athletes including Sakshi Malik, Bajrang Punia and Vinesh Phogat.

The Delhi Police filed chargesheet in connection with the case against the former WFI chief in June last year.

BJP also announced the candidature of Dinesh Pratap Singh from the Rae Bareli constituency.

Singh had also contested the polls from the same seat against Sonia Gandhi in 2019 and BJP has affirmed confidence on him.Rae Bareli seat has been a Gandhi family's stronghold. Congress' former chairperson Sonia Gandhi retained the seat in 2019. She, however, won't contest this time as she has been nominated to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. —*ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

Can't devise policy in middle of polls: HC on deepfake row

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

The Delhi High Court on Thursday reposed its trust in the Election Commission of India (ECI) to deal with the issue of deepfake technologies being used in the Lok Sabha poll campaign, saying it cannot devise a policy in the middle of elections.

The High Court directed a lawyers' organisation to give a representation to the ECI on its plea seeking directions to the poll panel for formulation of guidelines to prevent the misuse of deepfake videos.

The court also asked the ECI to expeditiously decide by May 6 the representation to be given by the petitioner, keeping in mind the urgency of the issue involved.

A bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora disposed of the petition, saying it cannot devise a policy in the middle of elections.

The court said only the methodology has changed and previously also rumours used to be spread about politicians. To this, the petitioner's counsel responded that deepfake content is a lot more vicious and faster.

The court said it trusts the ECI, which is a constitutional body, to act on the matter.

The court was hearing a plea by Lawyer's Voice, an organisation seeking directions to the ECI to formulate and implement the necessary guidelines and/or executive action which was necessary to address the public harm and democratic crisis caused by the pervasive use of deepfake technologies in the 2024 election campaign.

The plea also sought a direction to several social media platforms to take down and block deepfake content or those concerning political candidates or public figures on their respective platforms until the declaration of poll results.

During the hearing, the counsel for the ECI submitted that in case a comprehensive representation is filed by the petitioner with the commission, it will be decided in accordance with law on or before 6 May and that any appropriate steps which have to be taken, shall also be taken by them. —*PTI*

The High Court directed a lawyers' organisation to approach ECI on its plea for making guidelines to prevent deepfakes **PHOTO: PTI**

- A bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora disposed of the petition, saying it cannot devise a policy in the middle of elections

SHAH'S VIDEO: COPS TO SUMMON T'GANA CONG

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

The Delhi Police is likely to serve a second notice to the members of the Telangana Congress in connection with the uploading and sharing a fake video of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the officials said on Thursday.

The four members of the Telangana Congress, who were supposed to appear before the office of the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO), did not come on Wednesday.

"We will again ask them to appear before the IO (investigating officer), as they did not come on Wednesday," an officer, privy to the investigation said.

The summonses were issued to Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and four Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) members -- Shiva Kumar Ambala, Asma Tasleem, Satish Manne and Naveen Pettem -- under sections 91 and 160 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

On Wednesday, Reddy's lawyer appeared before the IO and asserted that he had nothing to do with creating or posting the doctored video of Shah's speech.

According to police, about 22 people from various political parties in the states of Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have been served notices in connection with the case and they have been asked to appear before the police on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. —*PTI*

- On Wednesday, Reddy's lawyer appeared before the IO and asserted that he had nothing to do with Shah's video

AAP starts signature campaign against Kejriwal's arrest, to send it to BJP

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

AAP on Thursday launched a signature campaign against the arrest of party supremo and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal here.

Two whiteboards were put up in Lajpat Nagar for people to write their messages for Kejriwal, who is currently lodged at Tihar Jail till 7 May. He was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on 21 March in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy.

AAP Jangpura MLA Praveen Kumar said the signature campaign will be conducted in different parts of the city to show the BJP that people of Delhi love their Chief Minister.

"We have started this campaign from here and will take it to different areas. We will collect these signatures and send them to BJP to show how much the people of Delhi love Kejriwal," Kumar said.

Slogans of 'jail ka jawab vote se denge' and 'Arvind Kejriwal zindabad' were also raised by the party workers at the event.

"The people of Delhi are extremely angry at the way Chief Minister Kejriwal was put in jail. They will revert with their votes against dictatorship and his arrest," AAP east Delhi Lok Sabha candidate Kuldeep Kumar said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

- Two whiteboards were put up in Lajpat Nagar for people to write their messages for Kejriwal, who is currently at Tihar Jail till 7 May

'Why did EC upload voting percentage after 11 days?'

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

Raising concerns over the credibility of the Election Commission (EC), following significant delays in the release of election data, Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament Kapil Sibal on Thursday asked why the voting percentage data for the first phase of Lok Sabha elections was uploaded 11 days after the polling day.

Sibal questioned the reliability of institutions in the eyes of the public, emphasising the importance of transparency and timely information.

"The Supreme Court has given a decision regarding the EVM and they have said that every citizen should have faith in the EC. But, is EC or any other agencies trustworthy? After the first phase, the data on the Election Commissioner website, about the vote percentage, was uploaded after 11 days. It only shows the percentage of the votes, not the number. I dont know what the reason is," Sibal said.

He emphasised that the Commission should address concerns regarding the delay by holding a press conference to explain the reasons behind the 11-day lag in releasing the data.

"I have spoken to previous election commissioners, and they have said that when they were in the election commission, then on the same day, or next morning, the results of the turn out would be released," he said.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court last week rejected all the petitions seeking 100 per cent verification of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) votes with their Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar also rejected their prayer to revert to paper ballot voting system. —*ANI*

IN KERALA

DYFI alleges cyberbullying of Left women

T'PURAM, 2 MAY

Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the youth wing of the CPI(M), alleged on Thursday that women politicians from Left parties in Kerala were subjected to severe cyberbullying by "an anarchic group" supported by the Congress.

DYFI leader and Rajya Sabha member A A Rahim alleged that senior CPI(M) leader KK Shailaja MLA and Thiruvananthapuram Mayor Arya Rajendran were being treated with "extreme indecency" by the supporters of the Congress and the Youth Congress in the cyber world.

"If anyone thinks that women who hold the red flag can be targeted in such an indecent way, you just need to keep that in mind. They are attacked only because they are left wing. They are treated with extreme indecency," Rahim told reporters here.

He said such attacks against women politicians were against the culture of Kerala.

"They think that they can eliminate Left women politicians (Shailaja and Rajendran) through such vicious cyber attacks. We will fight it politically. They (the women) know that they are being attacked for their political ideology," he said.

His statement comes amidst increased criticism in the cyber world against Mayor Rajendran for allegedly engaging in a verbal spat with the driver of a KSRTC bus in Thiruvananthapuram last week after blocking the passenger bus on a main city road.

Rajendran claimed the road was not blocked to stop the KSRTC bus, but CCTV visuals aired by news channels showed her private car parked across the zebra line on the road.

She has said that she spoke to the driver while the bus was stopped at the red signal area to raise her protest against his alleged sexually suggestive gestures towards her and her sister-in-law.

The driver, who was booked in connection with the incident, has refuted the allegations. Shailaja, the Left candidate from Vadakara Lok Sabha seat, has alleged she faced intense cyber attacks from activists of the Congress-led UDF during the election campaign. The Congress has not reacted to the allegations. —*PTI*

DYFI and CPI(M) accuse Congress of "indecency" **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Woman hit by train while shooting video, dies

HARIDWAR, 2 MAY

A 20-year-old, engineering student died after being hit by a train while shooting a video along the tracks at Roorkee here, police said on Thursday. Gangnahar Kotwali police station SHO Govind Ram said the incident occurred Wednesday evening when the victim, Vaishali was standing on the track near the Rahimpur railway gate with a friend. Vaishali was shooting a video with her mobile to be posted on social media when she was hit by a train. She died on the spot, the SHO said. Following this, the victim's friend informed the Vaishali's family who then approached the police, he added. Vaishali was a resident of the Haripur Tongia Buggawala area of Haridwar district and was studying in the College of Engineering, Roorkee (COER). *—PTI*

Girl raped multiple times by 2 men she met online

AGARTALA, 2 MAY

A 16-year-old girl in Tripura's Sepahijala district was allegedly raped multiple times by two men whom she met on social media, police said on Thursday. The girl became friends with the duo through Facebook and Instagram in March, they said. She went to the house of one of the accused at a remote village of the district on April 27 when she was allegedly raped by them again, said Sheuli Das, the officer-in-charge of the Bishalgarh women's police station.She returned home the next morning, the officer said. Sensing something was amiss with the girl, her parents asked her. "On this, she told her mother about the sequence of events," Das said. A police complaint was filed on Tuesday and one of the two accused was arrested, police said. *—PTI*

Mumbai Commuters suffer as train services hit

MUMBAI, 2 MAY

Day after an empty local train derailed near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) here, services on the Harbour line were badly affected during the morning peak hours on Thursday due to bunching of trains. The Central Railway (CR) said it happened due to the imposition of speed restriction at 10 kmph for local trains at the crossover point (track changing point) close to the CSMT station - the spot where two incidents of derailment occurred in three days. According to CR's chief public relations officer Swapnil Nila, the local trains on the route were running 25 to 30 minutes behind their usual schedule due to bunching of trains. *—PTI*

Constable dies after thieves inject him with poison

MUMBAI, 2 MAY

A 30-year-old constable posted with the Local Arms unit of the Mumbai police died in a hospital, days after a gang of robbers and drug addicts allegedly injected him with a poisonous substance on railway tracks here while he struggled to recover his phone from them, an official said on Thursday. The constable, Vishal Pawar, was admitted to a hospital in Thane, but lost the battle for life later on 1 May, he said. "The incident occurred around 9.30pm on 28 April when Pawar was going for duty on board a suburban train," the official said. An unidentified man picked up the phone and started running between the tracks After some distance, he was surrounded by a group of drug addicts and soon a scuffle broke out between them and one of the accused injected Pawar. *—PTI*

Wrong employments: Delhi LG sacks 223 DCW workers

Former DCW chief Swati Maliwal slammed the order

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

An order was issued to terminate 223 contractual employees of the Delhi Commission of Women after Lt Governor VK Saxena gave his nod to a proposal on it, officials said on Thursday.

The Women and Child Development (WCD) department of the Delhi government has directed the DCW to sack the contractual staffers who it said were hired without "following due procedure".

Former DCW chief and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal slammed the order.

In a Hindi post on X, she said, "LG Saheb has issued a 'Tughlaqi' order to remove all the contract staff of DCW. Today, there are a total of 90 staffers in the Women's Commission, out of which only eight people have been given by the government, the rest are on a contract for three months each."

"If all the contract staff are removed, the Women's Commission will be locked. Why are these people doing this? This organisation is built with blood and sweat. Instead of giving it staff and protection, you are destroying it from the roots? As long as I am alive, I will not let the Women's Commission be closed. Put me in jail, don't oppress women!" Maliwal said.

Delhi LG Saxena approved the department's proposal on termination of appointments, following which an order was issued *PHOTO: ANI*

According to officials, Saxena approved the department's proposal regarding the termination of appointments, following which the department issued an order on it.

"... the Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor has approved the proposal of the department that the appointments of contractual staff engaged in DCW without having sanctioned posts and without following due procedures is void- ab-initio and the same cannot be allowed to continue in DCW," read an official order issued by the WCD department on Monday.

"Therefore, the approval of the government is hereby conveyed to Delhi Commission for Women to discontinue the services of all contractual staff with immediate effect who have been appointed by DCW at any point of time, by going beyond its delegated power and without following various procedures laid down and in violation of DCW Act/rules/regulations/guidelines issued by Govt. of NCT of Delhi (GNCTD) from time to time," the order read.

"...no study was conducted to assess the actual requirement of additional staff and eligibility criteria for each post, no administrative approval and expenditure sanctioned was obtained from the GNCTD for engaging such manpower and applications for such posts were not formally invited, role and responsibility for any of these posts were not assigned and emoluments of some of the incumbents which were decided at the time of initial appointment, were enhanced very sharply and arbitrarily," read the order. *—PTI*

CBI SUBMITS REPORT

Sandeshkhali: HC asks WB govt to assist CBI

KOLKATA, 2 MAY

Calcutta High Court *PHOTO: ANI*

The Calcutta High Court in the Sandeshkhali case said that the CBI in its report has mentioned huge volumes of land grabbing allegations that have come in and lack of proper cooperation from the state authorities. The Court also directed the state to deploy more staff to help with the investigation.

Calcutta High Court chief justice division bench also allowed NHRC (National Human Rights Commission of India) as a party to the whole matter of sandeshkhali. The CBI have already started their investigation into the whole matter. The CBI at this point, doesn't want to reveal the contents of the report as the investigation is still on and it may harm the process, the court said.The court also said that it will monitor the whole investigation closely and mentioned that there should be confidence installed within the victims of sexual harassment and hence a team of lady CBI officers will be deployed.

The court in its report said that the District Magistrate (DM), SP and local authorities were asked to install CCTV cameras and street lights within 15 days of the last order but no report of the work has been submitted. The authorities are requested to act immediately and submit the report on the next date of hearing, otherwise action can be taken as it will be a contempt of court, it said.

The matter will now be heard next on 13 June. On Monday, the Supreme Court adjourned the hearing on West Bengal government's plea challenging Calcutta High Court order directing a CBI investigation into allegations allegations of land grabbing and sexual assault in Sandeshkhali, till July. *—ANI*

California cops say Goldy Brar not dead

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

Goldy Brar *PHOTO: X@GHARKEKALESH*

Police in the US state of California have dismissed reports that the victim of a shooting incident in Fresno city was Canada-based terrorist Satinderjit Singh alias Goldy Brar, who was the alleged mastermind in the murder of Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala, according to a media report.

Fresno Police on Wednesday identified the man killed in an alley at Fairmont and Holt avenues as 37-year-old Xavier Gladney in a gang-related interpersonal dispute.

Police on Wednesday also said the incident was not connected to a case involving a reputed gang killing in India, The Fresno Bee newspaper reported.

Fresno Police said the department was receiving several calls from international media and that officers were working to debunk any connections between the slayings, the paper said.

Police officers at 5:30 pm on Tuesday at the alley at Fairmont and Holt after receiving information about a shooting incident.

Officers arrived and found Gladney with a gunshot wound. He was taken to Community Regional Medical Center where he was pronounced dead. A 13-year-old was also dropped off at the hospital with a non-life-threatening wound.

Fresno Police Lt. Paul Cervantes on Wednesday said the teen was at the location where shots were fired. Homicide detectives have identified the alleged shooter as 33-year-old Darren Williams.

Cervantes said a warrant has been issued for Williams' arrest on suspicion of murder and assault with a deadly weapon The motive is a gang-related interpersonal dispute, Cervantes said.An activist of the banned Babbar Khalsa International, Brar has been involved in the smuggling of high-grade arms, ammunition and explosives. *—PTI*

Police and fire department personnel outside Mother Mary's School at Mayur Vihar *Photo: PTI*

Delhi bomb scare: Senders' intention was to create mass panic, says FIR

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

The intention of the bomb hoax emails received by nearly 200 Delhi schools was to "create mass panic and disturb public order," the Delhi Police says in an FIR registered by its Special Cell.

According to an official source, who has access to the FIR, at least 125 bomb threat calls were received from different schools from 5.47am to 2.13pm on Wednesday.

The person said that after receiving the calls, PCR vehicles were rushed to schools, and district police, BDS, MAC, Special Cell and Crime Control Room, DDMA, NDRF, Fire CATS and several other agencies were alerted.

Movement of these units to the schools "resulted in massive inconvenience," read a part of the FIR, according to the source.

The officials evacuated the schools in an "elaborate exercise" and carried out anti-sabotage checks across the city, he said.The emails were apparently sent with the "conspiratorial intention of creating mass panic and to disturb public," the source said.The First Information Report (FIR) has been registered at Special Cell Police Station under IPC sections 505 (2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes), 507 (criminal intimidation by an anonymous communication), and 120 (B) (punishment of criminal conspiracy). Around 200 schools in Delhi-NCR received an identical threat email Wednesday claim. *—PTI*

SC JUNKS CENTRE'S PLEA ON 2G SPECTRUM

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The Supreme Court Registry is learnt to have refused to accept the Centre's plea seeking modification of its 2012 verdict in the 2G spectrum case which had said the State was duty bound to adopt the auction route while transferring or alienating the country's natural resources.

Sources said the apex court registry termed the plea of the government as "misconceived" and an attempt to seek a review of the judgement in the guise of seeking clarification.

The Registrar refused to receive it as per the provisions of Order XV Rule 5 of the Supreme Court Rules, 2013.

"The Registrar may refuse to receive a petition on the ground that it discloses no reasonable cause or is frivolous or contains scandalous matter, but the petitioner may within 15 days of the making of such order, appeal by way of motion, from such refusal to the Court," the SC rule reads.

As per it, the Centre may appeal against the order of the Registrar.In its judgement delivered on 2 February, 2012, the apex court had quashed 2G spectrum licences given to various firms during the tenure of A Raja as the telecom minister in 2008.On 22 April, Attorney General R Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre, had mentioned the application before a bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice JB Pardiwala.While seeking urgent listing of the application, the top law officer had told the bench that the plea seeks modification of the 2012 verdict as the Centre wanted to grant 2G spectrum licences in other cases also. *—PTI*

Uttarakhand forest fires under control but challenges persist

RISHIKESH, 2 MAY

Nainital Forest Fire *PHOTO:PTI*

Chief Conservator of Forests in Garhwal Naresh Kumar Thursday said more than 300 incidents of forest fire have happened in the division so far and there is a need to be alert as challenges posed by the fire season persist.

He said forest fires in the Garhwal division have affected 350 hectares of forest land. 37 people, all underage, have been apprehended for setting fire to the forests, Kumar added.

"Challenges of the fire season persist. They can be contained only with public cooperation. All officers have been directed to communicate directly with villagers living near the forests. The temperatures are climbing gradually and so there is a need to be more alert," the official told reporters here.There are still two months to go before the end of the fire season, Kumar said.

He said fire watchers have been deployed at various places and blazes are being doused before they begin to flare up.

Public participation in extinguishing forest fires has also increased, Kumar said.

The Mahila Mangal Dal and the Yuvak Mangal Dal have also been involved in the exercise. Gram panchayats that do good work to protect the forests from fire will be given a cash incentive by the government, he said, adding that 450 such panchayats have been identified in Uttarakhand. *—PTI*

R'than village heads to be held over child marriages

JAIPUR, 2 MAY

The Rajasthan High Court has directed the state government to ensure that no child marriage takes place in the state, and said village heads and panchayat members will be held accountable if they are solemnised.

The court's order came on Wednesday ahead of the Akshay Tritiya festival on 10 May. Many child marriages are solemnised on Akshay Tritiya in Rajasthan.

A division bench of the court, while hearing a Public interest Litigation (PIL) seeking the court's intervention to prevent child marriages, noted that despite the Prohibition of Child Marriage act 2006 being in force, child marriages are still taking place in the state.

The court said though there is a reduction in the number of child marriages due to efforts put in by the authorities, a lot still needs to be done. RP Singh, counsel for the petitioners, said a list was also provided to the court wherein details of child marriages scheduled in the state was given."As per Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Rules 1996, a duty is cast upon sarpanch to restrict child marriages. Thus, as ameasure, we would direct the state to call for the report with regard to investigation done to prevent child marriages," court said. *—PTI*

Missing memory card stirs political slugfest in Kerala

T'PURAM, 2 MAY

Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly VD Satheesan on Thursday alleged a political plot behind the disappearance of the memory card from the CCTV camera on the KSRTC bus, which according to him, is a crucial evidence in the on-going rift between Thiruvananthapuram Mayor Arya Rajendran and the bus driver.

Satheesan said it is suspected that the memory card was deliberately removed and destroyed, fearing that their case would be defeated if the footage came out."It is mysterious that the memory card of the CCTV camera inside the bus went missing during the dispute between the mayor of Thiruvananthapuram and the KSRTC driver. The memory card disappeared amid allegations that the Mayor's husband and MLA Sachin Dev got into the bus and forced the passengers to get down," the Congress leader alleged in a statement."It should also be checked whether there is a political conspiracy behind the disappearance of the memory card, which would have been a crucial piece of evidence in the case," he added. His statement came a day after a team of police personnel from the Cantonment station, who examined the superfast bus parked at the KSRTC depot here, failed to retrieve the memory card. *—PTI*

DRIVING SCHOOLS UPSET

Kerala revamps licence modalities; protest on

T'PURAM, 2 MAY

The Kerala govt's move to revamp its driving licence test is making it more challenging for aspirants to obtain a licence *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

The Kerala government's move to completely revamp its driving licence test, making it more rigorous and challenging for aspirants to obtain a licence, is being challenged by driving school unions.

The unions have started a state-wide strike, suspending driving licence tests across Kerala. They demand withdrawal of the Motor Vehicles' Department circular that brought out the new reforms.

The Kerala Motor Vehicles' Department is to implement the new reforms on 2 May.

As per the circular, the applicant will have to undergo several real-life driving challenges and secure a pass to earn a licence. The circular made it mandatory to have the road test on a road with busy traffic and to have tests on angular parking, parallel parking, zig-zag driving, and gradient testing before conducting a 'H' test on the ground.

The union leaders claim they are not against the new reforms but want more time for implementation.

The unions are mainly opposing the directives to install a dashboard camera on vehicles used for learning and testing, as well as the ban on vehicles older than 15 years for testing and learning, they said.

"We are not against the new reforms. But we demand more time for implementation. We have not been given any training as to how to conduct the new tests, and no infrastructure has been prepared for the conduct of the new tests," Unni, a driving school owner and member of the All Kerala Driving School Owners' Association, told PTI. The association has moved the High Court. *—PTI*

THE ORDEAL

Ticketless passengers outside A1 cabin on Delhi Sarai Rohilla SF Express on Thursday blocking passengers from using the washroom
PHOTO: X/ @KUSHAL_MEHRA

How two key parties in UP collapsed over the years

Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav (L) and BSP Chief Mayawati. With 80 of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha –winning Uttar Pradesh is a key determinant of who rules nationally in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

SP-BSP

The Dalits are believed to be a loyal vote bank of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), currently led by Mayawati, the 68-year-old former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh.

It is not much different nearly 230km away in Etawah, a small town in western Uttar Pradesh and a bastion of the Samajwadi Party (SP) of Akhilesh Yadav, another former chief minister, who was in power from 2012 to 2017. There is little to be seen of the SP in terms of campaign props, and once again, saffron flags sit atop houses, commercial buildings and other establishments.

With 80 of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha –winning Uttar Pradesh is a key determinant of who rules nationally in New Delhi. Maharashtra, with the second-most number of constituencies at 48, comes a distant second.

In 2019, BJP and its allies won 64 seats in the state, and a coalition of BSP-SP and another regional party managed 15. This year, the SP is a member of the main Opposition INDIA alliance while Mayawati's BSP is going solo.

But with the third phase of the election coming up, both SP and BSP appear to be missing in action. The near-absence of a spirited campaign or any visible publicity by the two parties reflects a larger challenge they together face – a significant erosion from Uttar Pradesh in the face of the spectacular rise of the BJP, which has been ruling at the centre since 2014 and in the state since 2017.

SP and BSP once dominated the political landscape of Uttar Pradesh – each representing specific caste groups and with core supporters. The former counts on the Yadav community, who form roughly 9 percent of Uttar Pradesh's population and are recognised as Other Backward Classes (OBC), a term that refers to lesser privileged social groups.

For BSP, it is the Jatavs, a social group within the Dalits, who are broadly classified as the Scheduled Castes in the Indian constitution to make them eligible for various affirmative action programmes launched by the government. The Jatavs are about 10 percent of Uttar Pradesh's population.

To a large extent, SP, and to a more limited extent, BSP, also count on Muslims, who constitute nearly one-fifth of the state's population. SP has been known for its MY – Muslim Yadav – caste combination.

It is because of these loyal groups that the SP and the BSP haven't suffered a significant dent in their vote shares in Uttar Pradesh. However, while the two parties earlier succeeded in bringing more communities into their fold – allowing them to form governments – the trend seems to be reversed now.

SP was founded by Mulayam Singh Yadav, a wrestler-turned-socialist, in the early 1990s. Yadav served as Uttar Pradesh's chief minister for three terms – none of them for a full five years. His son Akhilesh was the chief minister from 2012 to 2017 before BJP retook the state. Yadav died in 2022. BSP Chief Mayawati, meanwhile, is a four-time chief minister – three brief stints and one full term from 2007 to 2012.

The two parties first formed a coalition to run the state government in 1993 before parting ways in 1995. After nearly 25 years of rivalry, the two again came together during the 2019 national election to take on a resurgent BJP, but could not make much impact.In the 2022 state Assembly election, the once-powerful BSP was reduced to just one of the 403 seats while the SP did reasonably well, winning 111. BJP and its allies won a comfortable 273 to form the government. Even the Yadavs, who otherwise remain steadfast in their support of the SP, acknowledge the criticism.

If SP is remembered for its alleged poor governance and law and order failures, Mayawati's tenures as Uttar Pradesh chief minister were admired across a cross-section of voters for their strong administration and reduced crime. "Behenji" (elder sister) was praised even among the non-Dalits for it.

Mayawati's victory in the 2007 state election was attributed to her clever formula of bringing the Brahmins and the Muslims together with the Dalits – a departure from the BSP's traditional anti-upper-caste and anti-Brahmin politics. However, she was forced to go back to her original vote bank after many Dalit groups accused her of diluting the BSP's core agenda. Meanwhile, the Brahmins and the Muslims largely went with the BJP and the SP respectively. BSP is now faced with corruption allegations, an exodus of its senior leaders to other parties, and the near-decimation of the party's organisation on the ground.

"BJP's rise can be primarily attributed to the BSP's inability to capitalise on the foundation laid by Kanshi Ram and his movement advocating for the empowerment of the Dalit community," said Singh, the political science professor.

Courtesy, Al Jazeera

SALAR سالار

Teens depend on social media algorithms for self-worth

Social media apps regularly present teens with algorithmically selected content often described as "for you," suggesting, by implication, that the curated content is not just "for you" but also "about you" – a mirror reflecting important signals about the person you are.

All users of social media are exposed to these signals, but researchers understand that teens are at an especially malleable stage in the formation of personal identity. Scholars have begun to demonstrate that technology is having generation-shaping effects, not merely in the way it influences cultural outlook, behavior and privacy, but also in the way it can shape personality among those brought up on social media.

The prevalence of the "for you" message raises important questions about the impact of these algorithms on how teens perceive themselves and see the world, and the subtle erosion of their privacy, which they accept in exchange for this view.

In an interview study of teens aged 13-17, it was found that personalized algorithmic content does seem to present what teens interpret as a reliable mirror image of themselves, and that they very much like the experience of seeing that social media reflection. They prefer a social media completely customized for them, depicting what they agree with, what they want to see and, thus, who they are.

It turns out that the teens interviewed believe social media algorithms like TikTok's have gotten so good that they see the reflections of themselves in social media as quite accurate. So much so that teens are quick to attribute content inconsistencies with their self-image as anomalies – for instance, the result of inadvertent engagement with past content, or just a glitch.

- Part of the remedy could be to build new tools using artificial intelligence to detect unsafe interactions while also protecting privacy. Another approach is to help teens reflect on these "data doubles" that they have constructed

When personalized content is not agreeable or consistent with their self-image, the teens say they scroll past it, hoping never to see it again. Even when these perceived anomalies take the form of extreme hypermasculine or "nasty" content, teens do not attribute this to anything about themselves specifically, nor do they claim to look for an explanation in their own behaviors. According to them, the social media mirror does not make them more self-reflective or challenge their sense of self.

"For you" offerings create a private-public space through which teens can access what they feel is a largely accurate test of their self-image. At the same time, they say they can easily ignore it if it seems to disagree with that self-image.The pact teens make with social media, exchanging personal data and relinquishing privacy to secure access to that algorithmic mirror, feels to them like a good bargain. They represent themselves as confidently able to tune out or scroll past recommended content that seems to contradict their sense of self, but research shows otherwise.

While teens were aware that what they see in their "for you" feed is the product of their scrolling habits on social media platforms, they are largely unaware or unconcerned that that data captured across apps contributes to this self-image. Regardless, they don't see their "for you" feed as a challenge to their sense of self, much less a risk to their self-identity – nor, for that matter, any basis for concern at all. Research on identity has come a long way since sociologist Erving Goffman proposed the "presentation of self" in 1959. He posited that people manage their identities through social performance to maintain equilibrium between who they think they are and how others perceive them. They have, in fact, proven themselves highly vulnerable to self-image distortion and other mental health problems based on social media algorithms explicitly designed to create and reward hypersensitivities, fixations and dysmorphia – a mental health disorder where people fixate on their appearance.

Part of the remedy could be to build new tools using artificial intelligence to detect unsafe interactions while also protecting privacy. Another approach is to help teens reflect on these "data doubles" that they have constructed.

Courtesy, The Conversation

The teens prefer a social media completely customized for them, depicting what they agree with, what they want to see and, thus, who they are ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

Meitei-Kuki couples forced to live apart, face an uncertain future

MANIPUR ONE YEAR ON

Kuki woman bringing up her newborn in a relief camp living away from her Meiti husband ***PHOTO: PTI***

Monthly dates in Mizoram or maybe Assam if at all, single parenting and the constant fear of abandonment. For Manipur's Meitei-Kuki couples forced to live apart in 'community' enclaves, this is how life has been since ethnic clashes broke out in the state last May.

As crisis continues in the polarised state, where the Meitis are concentrated in Imphal Valley and the Kukis have moved to the hills around, inter-tribe couples are facing the cruel blunt of a conflict that has claimed more than 200 lives and displaced many thousands since 3 May, 2023.

If a mother gets to see her children maybe once a month, there is a father who hasn't seen his daughter since she was born. And then there is the constant fear of family bonds being strained perhaps to breaking point with a wife wondering if her husband will abandon her and a couple contemplating what lies ahead for them as a unit. The future stretches uncertain.

Irene Haokip, for instance, is a Kuki who moved to Imphal after she got married. One year on, the 42-year-old has moved to Churachandpur, a Kuki dominated area, to be with her family while her husband and their children, a five-year-old son and a three-year-old daughter, stay on in Imphal.

"My husband used to work as a construction contractor. I met him when a neighbour's house in Bishnupur was getting constructed. We fell in love and he would come to the area to meet me often. We got married in 2018 and have two children," Haokip said.

Bishnupur is between Meitei dominated Imphal and Kuki dominated Churachandpur. It earlier housed people from both communities and is now considered a buffer zone.

"My husband sent me to my parents' home last year fearing for my safety in the valley when clashes broke out. There has been no going back since. The children are with him because we fear that they might not be safe in Churachandpur since they are Meitei children," Haokip added.

She meets her family once a month in neighbouring Mizoram, travelling 15 hours each way.

"He brings the children there too. Many other couples also do that. We meet once a month and come back to our respective houses. My children miss me but it feels like a choice between being alive and mothers' love."

As Manipuris count their losses, many say that this was not always so. Meitei-Kuki marriages were not uncommon and never a source of societal trouble with the two communities mingling easily. It changed on 3 May when trouble broke out after after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

A month later, Laishram Singh, a Kuki, became a father.

He wanted to be the best father when he got to know about his wife's pregnancy in 2022. They were expecting their first child in June and were shopping for clothes and toys.

But destiny had other plans.

Singh moved to the hills where Kukis live and his wife Achanba, a Meitei, stayed back. She had lost her parents five years ago and had to move to a relief camp in Imphal Valley in May last year where she gave birth to a girl in June.

- As crisis continues in Manipur where the Meitis are concentrated in Imphal Valley and the Kukis have moved to the hills around, inter-tribe couples are facing the cruel blunt of a conflict that has claimed more than 200 lives

Eleven months later, Singh hasn't yet met his daughter.

Achanba worries the distance might just end her marriage.

"I have a husband but I am still forced to live life as a single mother... he calls me sometimes and I send him pictures but the communication is gradually dropping. I fear that if this goes on for long, his family might pressure him into marrying a Kuki girl and he will abandon me. This also causes us to fight."

"I am not a widow, I am not a divorcee...I don't know what kind of separation is this," Achanba added helplessly.

Nirmala, a Kuki, who ran a shop in all women market Ima Keithel till last year, now lives in the hills and has no stable means of livelihood. She also fears being abandoned.

Her husband, a Meitei, who lives with their son and his parents in Sugnu area in Meitei dominated Imphal, initially used to send her money but has stopped.

"We have been married for 15 years. My shop was a good contributor to our household income that has stopped now. Here I live with my brother and sister-in-law and take up odd jobs but there is no stable income. I feel like I am a burden on them..if this continues I will have to move to a relief camp," 45-year-old Nirmala said.

Others such as Pema Dimpu and her Kuki husband say they are constantly discussing whether they should move to another state. Dimpu, a Meitei, stays in Imphal Valley while her husband has gone to the hills.

"That seems to be the only way out now that we move somewhere else and start a new life. It has been a year and there is no peace in sight... no idea when we can coexist like before without the threat of life constantly looming over us," Dimpu said. The hill state has witnessed sporadic, sometime intense, ethnic clashes since May 3 last year between the majority Meitei community and the Kukis.

—PTI

Pak leader says Khan's govt ousted 'constitutionally'

ISLAMABAD, 2 MAY

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) Senate leader Barrister Ali Zafar said the previous Imran Khan-led government was ousted "constitutionally," Geo News reported. He made the remarks during the Geo News programme 'Capital Talk', opposing the chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur, who had announced "storming Islamabad to overthrow the government in Centre", calling it 'unconstitutional'. "There are several constitutional ways of toppling the government and our government, too, was removed constitutionally after a vote of no-confidence," Ali Zafar said, according to Geo News, adding that he considers such mechanisms 'legal'. Zafar added that the current government can be overthrown at any time. *—PTI*

Cambodia's army base explosion was an accident: Min

PHNOM PENH, 2 MAY

A huge explosion at a military base in southwestern Cambodia that killed 20 soldiers and injured many others was an accident caused by a "technical issue" stemming from the old and degraded ammunition that was being moved, the Defense Ministry said Thursday. The army said on Tuesday that Saturday's blast was believed to have been an accident caused by mishandling of ammunition by troops. The Defense Ministry's statement followed an allegation leveled by an opposition politician-in-exile suggesting that the explosion had been an attack. The day after the explosion, exiled opposition leader Sam Rainsy claimed in a post on his Facebook page that an armed group of anti-government dissidents had caused the blast but cited no evidence to support his claim. *—AP*

PHOTO: EPA

Solomon Islands elects pro-China head Manele as PM

HONIARA, 2 MAY

The Solomon Islands' legislators have chosen Jeremiah Manele, a former foreign minister, to be their new prime minister. In a secret ballot on Thursday, Manele, who has promised to uphold the Pacific nation's China-friendly foreign policy, received 31 votes, according to Al Jazeera. Whereas, his opponent, longtime opposition leader Matthew Wale, secured 18 votes. The vote in the 50-member parliament took place amid heightened security in the capital, Honiara, with squadrons of police patrolling the parliamentary grounds to ward off potential unrest. Manele, speaking outside the parliament, praised the fact there was no repeat of past iolence. *—ANI*

Joshua Dean: Boeing Whistleblower dies

His aunt said he had a major bacterial infection

WASHINGTON, 2 MAY

A whistleblower who accused a Boeing supplier of ignoring defects in the production of the 737 MAX has died at the age of 45, family members and his lawyer have said.

Joshua Dean, a former Spirit AeroSystems employee who alleged he was fired in retaliation for flagging lax standards at the company's Wichita, Kansas, manufacturing plant, died on Tuesday after a sudden illness, his aunts and sister said in posts on social media. He was 45 and had been critically ill for the past two weeks. His aunt Carol Parsons said he was intubated and developed pneumonia and then a serious bacterial infection, MRSA.

Dean's lawyer Brian Knowles said his client's death was a "loss to the aviation community and the flying public". "He possessed tremendous courage to stand up for what he felt was true and right and raised quality and safety issues. Aviation companies should encourage and incentivise those that do raise these concerns. Otherwise, safety and quality are truly not these companies' top priorities," Knowles told Al Jazeera.

Spirit AeroSystems said the company's thoughts were with his family. "This sudden loss is stunning news here at Spirit and for his loved ones," a spokesperson told Al Jazeera.

Josua Dean was 45 and had been critically ill for the past two weeks
PHOTO: X/@MAPICC2021

Dean's mother wrote in a Facebook post last month that her son was "fighting for his life" after contracting pneumonia and suffering a stroke following an MRSA infection. The Seattle Times, which first reported his death, said Dean was 45 years old and had "been in good health and was noted for having a "healthy lifestyle".

Dean's death comes less than two months after Boeing whistleblower John Barnett was found dead from what South Carolina authorities said was an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound. Barnett, 62, had been in the midst of a deposition in a lawsuit against Boeing after suffering retaliation for exposing safety problems with the Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

Spirit AeroSystems has been under scrutiny since it emerged that it built the door panel that blew out of a 737 MAX 9 in mid-flight in January. The near-disaster involving Alaska Airlines Flight 1282, which is the subject of several probes, was the latest in a series of incidents to raise concerns about safety standards at Boeing.

—Al Jazeera/ Seattle Times

FACE OF OUR ANCESTOR

A face of 75,000-year-old Neanderthal woman revealed. Scientists have produced a remarkable reconstruction of what a Neanderthal woman would have looked like when she was alive. It is based on the flattened, shattered remains of a skull whose bones were so soft when excavated they had the consistency of "a well-dunked biscuit". Researchers first had to strengthen the fragments before reassembling them. Expert palaeoartists then created the 3D model. The representation appears in a new BBC Studios documentary for Netflix called Secrets of the Neanderthals, which examines what we know about our long-lost evolutionary cousins, who became extinct about 40,000 years ago.

PHOTO: BBC STUDIOS/ JAMIE SIMONDS

'Russia uses choking agent in Ukraine'

KIYV, 2 MAY

The US has accused Russia of deploying chemical weapons as a "method of warfare" in Ukraine, in violation of international laws banning their use.

State department officials said Russia used the choking agent chloropicrin to win "battlefield gains" over Ukraine. The allegations, which US officials said were not an "isolated" incident, would contravene the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which Russia signed. The Kremlin has yet to comment, but has denied similar allegations in the past. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), a global watchdog that oversees implementation of the CWC, says a chemical weapon is a substance used to cause intentional death or harm through its toxic properties.

In 2017, the OPCW said

WWI soldiers are using protective gear while using weapon
PHOTO: BRITANNICA

Russia had destroyed the last of its Cold War-era stockpile of the weapons, as required under the CWC. States are also prohibited from developing or acquiring new weapons under the 1993 convention, which is signed by 193 states. Since 2017, Russia has been accused of at least two chemical attacks - the Salisbury attack on a former Soviet intelligence officer and the 2020 poisoning of the late Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Chloropicrin - which the US says Russia has used to "dislodge Ukrainian forces from fortified positions" - is an oily substance which was widely used during WW1. It causes irritation of the eyes and skin and can cause vomiting, nausea and diarrhoea, according to the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC).

The chemical's use in war is expressly banned under the CWC, and is listed as a choking agent by the OPCW. The state department also said Moscow has regularly used "riot control agents," or tear gas, during the war.

President Joe Biden has previously warned Russia against deploying chemical weapons in Ukraine. In March 2022, just weeks after Moscow launched its invasion, Biden vowed that Russia would pay a "severe price" if it did use chemical weapons. "We would respond if he uses it," the president said. *—PTI*

GROWING TENSIONS

US passes bill that expands definition of anti-Semitism

WASHINGTON, 2 MAY

The United States House of Representatives has overwhelmingly passed a bill that would expand the federal definition of anti-Semitism, despite Opposition from civil liberties groups.

The bill passed the House on Wednesday by a margin of 320 to 91, and it is largely seen as a reaction to the ongoing antiwar protests unfolding on US university campuses. It now goes to the Senate for consideration.

If the bill were to become law, it would codify a definition of anti-Semitism created by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That is a federal anti-discrimination law that bars discrimination based on shared ancestry, ethnic characteristics or national origin. Adding IHRA's definition to the law would allow the federal Department of Education to restrict funding and other resources to campuses perceived as tolerating anti-Semitism.

But critics warn IHRA's definition could be used to stifle campus protests against Israel's war in Gaza, which has claimed the lives of 34,568 Palestinians so far.

What is the definition?

IHRA's working definition of anti-Semitism is "a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities".

Bipartisan criticism

Rights groups, however, have raised concerns the definition nevertheless conflates criticism of the state of Israel and Zionism with anti-Semitism.

In a letter sent to lawmakers on Friday, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) urged House members to vote against the legislation, saying federal law already prohibits anti-Semitic discrimination and harassment.

The IHRA adopted its current definition of anti-Semitism in 2016, and its framing has been embraced by the US State Department under President Joe Biden and his two predecessors.

—Al Jazeera

The IHRA adopted its current definition of anti-Semitism in 2016
PHOTO: AP

Israel accused of possible war crimes

WEST BANK, 2 MAY

In the early afternoon of 29 November last year, several Palestinian boys descended on to their street in the occupied West Bank, where they often played together. Minutes later, two of them lay dead from gunshots fired by Israeli soldiers - Basil, 15, and eight-year-old Adam. As part of an investigation into the conduct of Israel's security forces in the West Bank, which has been under military occupation for more than half a century, BBC has pieced together what happened on the day the two boys were killed. Mobile phone and CCTV footage, witness testimony and detailed investigation of the scene, including taking measurements, combine to reveal evidence suggesting serious human rights violations. *—PTI*

Hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters remain on UCLA campus

LOS ANGELES, 2 MAY

Hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters on Thursday remained behind barricades on the University of California (UCLA) campus despite police orders to leave as officers were poised to move in on their fortified encampment that was ringed by an even larger crowd, including supporters who locked arms and curious onlookers.

Huge numbers of police began arriving late in the afternoon on Wednesday, and empty buses were parked near the University of California, Los Angeles to take away protesters who don't comply with the order.

The tense standoff came one night after violence instigated by counter-protesters erupted in the same place. A small city sprang up inside the barricaded encampment, full of hundreds of people and tents on the campus quad. Some protesters said Muslim prayers as the sun set over the campus, while others chanted "we're not leaving" or passed out goggles and surgical masks. They wore helmets and headscarves, and discussed the best ways to handle pepper spray or tear gas as someone sang over a megaphone. A few constructed homemade shields out of plywood in case they clashed with police forming skirmish lines elsewhere on the campus. "For rubber bullets, who wants a shield?" a protester called out.

Meanwhile, a large crowd of students, alumni and neighbours gathered on campus steps outside the tents, sitting as they listened and applauded various speakers and joined in pro-Palestinian chants. A group of students holding signs and wearing T-shirts in support of Israel and Jewish people demonstrated nearby. *—AP*

Pak: 77 militant attacks reported in April

ISLAMABAD, 2 MAY

Following a brief lull in March, militant attacks in Pakistan surged once again in April, as the country experienced 77 verifiable attacks last month, a security assessment report by an Islamabad-based think-tank said.

Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies in a report said the attacks, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa particularly bearing the brunt, resulted in 70 fatalities, including 35 civilians and 31 members of security forces, Dawn News reported on Thursday.

It said four militants were killed, and 67 individuals- 32 civilians and 35 security personnel -- were injured in the attacks. In comparison, March saw 56 militant attacks, resulting in 77 fatalities and 67 injuries. This indicates a 38 per cent increase in the number of militant attacks, although there was a nine per cent decline in deaths, with no change in the number of injuries. The security report also underscored the efforts of the country's security forces in thwarting numerous potential attacks during the month.

At least 55 suspected militants were killed and 12 others arrested, including individuals involved in the Basham suicide attack, marking a 55 per cent increase in militant deaths compared to March. *—PTI*

GENERAL ELECTION

What is at stake in UK local voting?

LONDON, 2 MAY

Voters in England and Wales will cast their ballots on Thursday in local elections that will be the last big test before a UK general election. All indicators show this will see Conservative Party ousted from power after 14 years.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak hopes he can point to successes, notably in a couple of key mayoral races, to douse talk that Conservative Party will change leader again before the United Kingdom's main election, which could take place next month. On the other hand, Labour Party leader Keir Starmer hopes local elections confirm what opinion polls have shown for two years — that Labour is on course for power for the first time since 2010.

Here are five things to know:

What's happening?

Voters in England and Wales will go to polls for local, mayoral, and police and crime commissioner elections.

xxxxx
PHOTO: ANADOLU AGENCY

The voting is the final test before the general election, which will take place by January 2025 but Sunak has the power to decide the date. He has indicated it will be in the second half of 2024. In London, where Sadiq Khan is expected to win a third term, there are more than 100 elections to local councils and nearly 40 for local police and crime commissioners.

What's at stake for Sunak?

Potentially his job. In October 2022, Sunak replaced Liz Truss, who quit after 45 days following a budget of unfunded tax cuts that roiled financial markets and sent borrowing costs for homeowners surging. Sunak, who warned about the economic implications of Truss' plan, was supposed to be a steady hand. If opinion polls are right, he's not improved the Conservatives' ratings, which is battered by the circus surrounding Johnson, who was ousted over ethics scandals.

Is labour headed for power?

Labour's performance in 2019 was its worst since 1935. Starmer has tried to bring the party back to the centre of British politics after the five-year leadership of veteran left-winger Jeremy Corbyn.

According to opinion polls, this has worked.

Are voters being tactical?

One of the contributing factors to Blair's victory in 1997 came from so-called tactical voting, whereby some voters put aside their preferred political party and back whoever they think is most likely to defeat the Conservative candidate. *—PTI*

Death toll rises to 48 in China highway collapse

BEIJING, 2 MAY

The death toll in the collapse of a section of a mountainside expressway in China's Guangdong province doubled to 48 on Thursday, the official media reported, as more than 20 vehicles tumbled down a slope.

The disaster involving a large number of vehicles was caused on Wednesday by a landslide at the Chayang section of the Meizhou-Dabu Expressway in Meizhou city on the first day of the five-day May Day holiday.

The collapsed section of the expressway measures 17.9 metres long and covers an area of 184.3 square metres. So far 48 people were killed and several others injured, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. On Wednesday the death toll was 24.

The collapse happened on Wednesday early morning after a month of heavy rains in a mountainous part of southern Guangdong province. Vehicles fell down the slope and some caught fire, reports said. Chinese President Xi Jinping has given "important instructions" on the rescue and disaster relief work following the fatal expressway collapse, the report said.

PHOTO: X/@TELLUS74

All regions and relevant departments must ensure the safety of people's lives and property and the overall social stability, he said. Premier Li Qiang has also given instructions to spare no effort in rescuing the injured, carry out follow-up work, do everything possible to search and rescue trapped persons, and strictly guard against secondary risks. *—PTI*

Georgia rocked by clashes over 'foreign agent' bill

GEORGIA, 2 MAY

Riot police in Georgia fired tear gas and water cannon to disperse crowds for a second night, as protests continued against a proposed law denounced by opponents as Russian-inspired.

A number of people were hurt during the protests after parliament approved the second reading of the controversial "foreign agent" bill on Wednesday. The EU warns it could harm Tbilisi's ambitions of joining the bloc. The European Commission head said she was watching events with great concern. "The Georgian people want a European future for their country," Ursula von der Leyen posted on X. The governing Georgian Dream party argues the bill will "boost transparency" of foreign funding, but protesters fear it could be used to crush critical voices ahead of parliamentary elections this year. *—BBC News*

Rupee falls 3 paise to settle at 43.46 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 2 MAY

The rupee stayed range-bound and closed 3 paise lower at 83.46 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid a strong American currency and rising crude oil prices in global markets. Forex traders said positive sentiment in the domestic equity markets and the inflow of foreign capital capped a sharp fall in the domestic currency. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened strong at 83.41 and touched the intra-day low of 83.49 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.46 (provisional) against the dollar, down 3 paise from its previous close. The rupee had settled 2 paise higher at 83.43 against the dollar on Tuesday, a day after losing 7 paise on Monday. The foreign exchange market was closed on Wednesday on account of Maharashtra Day. On Wednesday, the US Federal Reserve decided to maintain the status quo on the benchmark interest rates, in line with the market expectations. *—PTI*

Gold climbs ₹500; silver jumps ₹400

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

Gold prices climbed Rs 500 to Rs 72,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a rally in precious metal rates in the global market, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous session, it had closed at Rs 71,850 per 10 grams. Silver prices also jumped Rs 400 to Rs 83,500 per kg. It had ended at Rs 83,100 per kg in the previous trade. The commodity markets were partially closed on May 1 on the occasion of Maharashtra Day/Labour Day. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 72,350 per 10 grams, up by Rs 500, taking bullish cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,304 per ounce, up by USD 16 from the previous close. *—PTI*

SK Finance files papers with SEBI to garner ₹2,200cr

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

Vehicle finance and business loans-focused non-bank lender SK Finance has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator SEBI to garner Rs 2,200 crore through an initial share sale. The proposed initial public offer (IPO) is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 500 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to Rs 1,700 crore by promoters and investor shareholders, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Wednesday. As a part of the OFS, Norwest Venture Partners X-Mauritius and TPG Growth IV SF PTE Ltd will offload shares worth Rs 700 crore each, *—PTI*

L&T Tech inks pact worth €45M with auto firm Forvia

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

L&T Technology Services (LTTS) on Thursday said it has entered into a partnership worth 45 million euros with French automobile company Forvia "for the benefit of clean mobility divisions" of the two firms. The five-year partnership, which is valued at approximately 45 million euros, will deliver engineering services for Forvia, LTTS said in a statement. Under the agreement, about 300 engineers from Forvia's Augsburg (Germany) and Bengaluru (India) sites have already been transferred to LTTS. These teams will develop internal combustion engine related activities within LTTS. The company said these engineers will continue their activities for Forvia from their current locations, "guaranteeing seamless collaboration and ongoing support for end customers across Digital PLM (product lifecycle management) initiatives". *—PTI*

'Tax concessions not presumptive loss'

Ex-RBI guv was talking about 2G scam

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

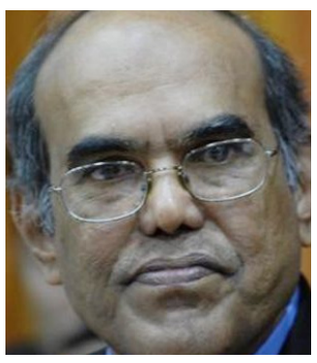
If tax concessions announced by the government are treated as 'presumptive loss' by federal auditor Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), it would diminish democracy and not enhance it, opined former RBI Governor Duvvuri Subbarao.

Subbarao, who held various positions including the Union finance secretary, wrote in his new book titled 'Just A Mercenary?: Notes from My Life and Career' about his involvement in the decision-making on the pricing of the 2G spectrum, an issue that embroiled the UPA-2 government amid charges of mammoth corruption.

"If a democratically elected government decides to forego revenue in order to serve the larger public good of deepening telecom penetration, is it open to the CAG to substitute his own judgement for the government's and call it a 'presumptive loss'?" he asked.

Subbarao was responding to a question on the 2G scam case and the CAG's investigation of the presumptive loss to the government during the UPA-2 period.

"If the CAG is allowed to enter into this issue, what could then stop him to go on logically to question every tax concession in the budget as a presumptive loss? "Surely, that would diminish, not enhance, our democracy," he said.



Duvvuri Subbarao ***PHOTO: PTI***

- In 2007, the DoT under the erstwhile ministerial charge of A Raja of the DMK, a partner in the UPA coalition, determined that there was a case for licensing more 2G operators in each of the twenty-three telecom circles in the country in order to encourage competition in the sector

Subbarao emphasised that the prerogative of the CAG to do a special audit of spectrum pricing is unquestionable.

In 2007, the Department of Telecom (DoT) under the erstwhile ministerial charge of A Raja of the DMK, a partner in the UPA coalition, determined that there was a case for licensing more 2G operators in each of the twenty-three telecom circles in the country in order to encourage competition in the sector.

The department consulted TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India), and TRAI, in turn, endorsed the need to increase the number of operators and recommended that fresh licensees should be given spectrum at the same price at which incumbent operators had gotten it, which was the price set in an auction in 2001.

The absence of a level-playing field, TRAI argued, would disadvantage fresh entrants and defeat the goal of deepening telecom services.

The 2001 cabinet decision stipulated that all future pricing of spectrum would be decided jointly by DoT and the Ministry of Finance. *—PTI*

POWER GRID GAINER

Markets rebound as GST revenues hit record in April

MUMBAI, 2 MAY

Sensex climbs 128.33 points or 0.17 per cent ***PHOTO: PTI***

Stock markets rebounded on Thursday with benchmark Sensex closing higher by 128 points as record GST collections in April, positive manufacturing data, and foreign fund inflows boosted investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 128.33 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 74,611.11. During the day, it jumped 329.65 points or 0.44 per cent to 74,812.43.

The NSE Nifty went up by 43.35 points or 0.19 per cent to 22,648.20.

From the Sensex basket, Power Grid, Asian Paints, Tata Motors, Tata Steel, NTPC, Sun Pharma, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Tata Consultancy Services and JSW Steel were among the major gainers.

Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bharti Airtel, Axis Bank, Wipro, ICICI Bank and IndusInd Bank were among the laggards.

Goods and Services Tax collections grew 12.4 per cent to a record high of Rs 2.10 lakh crore in April, aided by strong economic momentum and increased domestic transactions and imports, the finance ministry said on Wednesday.

The GST collections have breached the Rs 2 lakh crore mark for the first time in April this year, it said in a statement.

- Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bharti Airtel, Axis Bank, Wipro, ICICI Bank and IndusInd Bank were among the laggards

India's manufacturing sector activity moderated in April but still recorded the second fastest improvement in operating conditions in three-and-a-half years supported by buoyant demand, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 59.1 in March to 58.8 in April, signalling the second-best improvement in the health of the sector for three-and-a-half years.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

In Asian markets, Hong Kong settled with gains while Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended mixed on Wednesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.02 per cent to USD 84.29 a barrel. *—PTI*

Majority of the planes require engine and spare parts ***PHOTO: PTI***

Go First to take longer to fly them out of India

MUMBAI, 2 MAY

Lessors are likely to take a longer time to fly the Go First's deregistered 54 planes out of the country as the majority of the planes require engine and spare parts, according to industry experts.

Out of the 54 planes, around 24 that were in a flying condition when the airline stopped operations last May have not undergone continued maintenance while 30 are without engines and spare parts.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has deregistered all the 54 remaining aircraft of Go First after a Delhi High Court ruling on April 26 that allowed lessors to take back the leased planes.

While the insolvency resolution process is on, sources said the airline's revival looks an uphill task, considering that there are not many assets left after the deregistration of the planes.

Regarding these aircraft, one of the sources said lessors are likely to take more time to ferry the 54 planes out of the country as at least 30 of them will require replacement of engines.

Besides, the planes will require various approvals so that they are fit to fly as they remain grounded for a year now, the sources added.

Aircraft leasing company Vman's CEO Vishok Mansingh said that around 24 aircraft of Go First were in a flying condition when the airline stopped operations on 3 May, 2023.

"Those aircraft have not undergone continuous maintenance work after July. So, the lessors will now have to get approvals from engine maker Pratt & Whitney and Airbus for the technical ferry of the aircraft so that they can be taken out of the country, possibly to a nearby Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility," he said. *—PTI*

IIFCL AMC, 4 others settle MF norm violation

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

IIFCL Asset Management Company along with four individuals have settled with SEBI a case pertaining to alleged violation of mutual fund norms after paying Rs 1.02 crore collectively towards settlement charges.

The four individuals who settled the case are -- Emandi Sankara Rao, Prasanna Prakash Panda, Anil Kumar Taneja and Sumiran Bansal.

The entities allegedly violated mutual funds norms with respect to investment made by IIFCL AMC in several firms such as GVR Infra Pvt Ltd, DP Jain & Co Infrastructure, DPJ-DRA Tollways, Feedback Energy Distribution Company Ltd and Feedback Infra Pvt Ltd, according to a settlement order passed by SEBI on 30 April.

Pending adjudication proceedings, the entities filed settlement applications with SEBI proposing to settle the alleged regulatory violations case against them,"without admitting or denying the findings of facts and conclusions of law, through a settlement order".

SEBI settled the proceedings initiated against them through a showcause notice issued in June 2023.

With respect to investment in DP Jain & Co Infrastructure, SEBI in its showcause notice, alleged that the AMC failed to ensure the security creation, did not obtain NOC from all the existing lenders, failed to charge penal interest for conditions defined as "event of default" in the Debenture Trust. In the case of investment in Feedback Infra, SEBI alleged that equity shares of Feedback Highways OMT which was supposed to be pledged, had not been pledged and all investments including in IL&FS, pending deployment of funds, were contrary to the PPMs (Private Placement Memorandums) of the schemes. *—PTI*

IN 2023-24

Adani Ports' net profits jump 50% to ₹8,104 crore

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone on Thursday reported that its Profit After Tax or net profits during the just-concluded financial year 2023-24 grew by a whopping 50 per cent to Rs 8,104 crore. In 2022-23, they were at Rs 5,391 crore.

During the fourth quarter January-March, the net profits grew 77 per cent to Rs 2,015 crore.

Coming to the revenue from operations for the entire financial year and the fourth quarter, they grew 28 per cent and 19 per cent to Rs 26,711 crore and Rs 6,897 crore, respectively. 2023-24 has been a year of many new milestones for APSEZ on both operational and financial metrics.

Adani Ports delivered 3x the India cargo growth rate and a record volume of 420 million tonne. "Clearly, the company's business model of end-to-end service, strategic partnership with key customers, leveraging the network effect through its string of ports, and focus on operational efficiencies is yielding results, said Ashwani Gupta, Whole-Time Director and CEO, APSEZ.

In fourth quarter the net profits grew 77 per cent ***PHOTO: PTI***

Adani Ports is well poised to achieve 500 million tonne of cargo volumes in 2025, aided by the recently acquired Gopalpur Port, and the scheduled commissioning of Vizhinjam Port in the current year and WCT (West Container Terminal) next year, said Gupta.

"We continue to invest heavily in the business to drive growth, particularly in the logistics segment. Our efforts towards sustainable business growth are well recognized in the top decile ESG rating from four global rating agencies," added Gupta. *—ANI*

'India to grow 6.6 % in next two years'

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

India's GDP is projected to grow at 7.8 per cent in the just-concluded financial year 2023-24 and the forecast is for around 6.6 per cent in each of the following two fiscal years, according to OECD's latest Economic Outlook. However, global near-term developments pose obstacles to higher growth.

In the report the Paris-based research body Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has said India's domestic demand will be driven by gross capital formation, particularly in the public sector, with private consumption growth remaining sluggish.

OECD is a group of 37 member countries that discuss and develop economic and social policy. In the report, OECD asserted that exports will continue to grow, especially of services such as information technology and consulting.

Headline inflation will decline gradually, although uncertainty about food inflation remains elevated, it added. In India, consumer price index (CPI) inflation was 4.9 per cent in March after averaging 5.1 per cent in the preceding two months, following the recent peak of 5.7 per cent in December 2023. *—ANI*

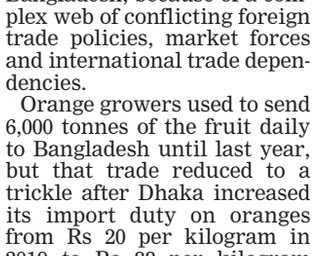


PHOTO: PTI

NAGPUR ORANGE FARMERS IN PICKLE

KATOL, 2 MAY

In the baking-hot fields of central India around Nagpur, onion has hit orange hard in a mini-trade war whose battle lines were drawn thousands of miles away. Caught in the crossfire, cotton too has become a casualty.

Thousands of farmers in Maharashtra's Vidarbha region, famous for its oranges, are sitting on a surplus of the fruit, unable to sell it in its main export market, Bangladesh, because of a complex web of conflicting foreign trade policies, market forces and international trade dependencies.

Orange growers used to send 6,000 tonnes of the fruit daily to Bangladesh until last year, but that trade reduced to a trickle after Dhaka increased its import duty on oranges from Rs 20 per kilogram in 2019 to Rs 88 per kilogram in November 2023.

Farmers in Vidarbha believe that Bangladesh increased the import duty in retaliation after India banned the export of onion, a staple of local cuisine, to protect the domestic market.

The ripple effect showed how intricately linked is global trade, where one action can impact tens of thousands of lives across a continent. *—PTI*

FOR OLDER PEOPLE

India needs to expand health coverage

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

India is one of the lowest among the Asia Pacific nations when it comes to health insurance for older people and needs to expand universal health coverage to meet the needs of rapidly ageing population and sustain growth momentum, a report by ADB said on Thursday.

While the South Korea and Thailand have achieved universal health coverage, others lag behind with India having the lowest health insurance coverage among older people at 21 per cent, a report titled 'Aging Well In Asia' prepared by ADB said.

However, schemes like Ayushman Bharat that provides cashless healthcare to bottom quartile of population has improved health coverage since its launch, ADB senior economist Aiko Kikkawa said here. Expanding it further will improve the condition and make people aged over 60 years more productive for the economy, she said, adding, silver dividend can be higher for such countries who gainfully employ them.

India has the lowest health insurance coverage among older people at 21 per cent ***PHOTO: PTI***

Besides achieving universal health coverage, she said, it is also critical to extend essential services and interventions that optimize older people's physical and functional capacity.

The report further said that economic growth impact due to ageing population during 2031-40 would be lower in the case of India as it would still have high young population.

According to the report, the number of people aged 60 and older in developing Asia and the Pacific is set to nearly double by 2050 to 1.2 billion -- or about a quarter of the total population -- significantly increasing the need for pension and welfare programmes as well as healthcare services.

At the same time, economies have an opportunity to reap a "silver dividend" in the form of additional productivity from older people, which could boost gross domestic product in the region by 0.9 per cent on average, ADB Chief economist Albert Park said.

With a view to widen the market and foster adequate protection from healthcare expenses, insurance regulator IRDAI recently removed the age limit of 65 years for individuals buying health insurance policies.

By abolishing the maximum age restriction on purchasing health insurance plans, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) targets to foster a more inclusive and accessible healthcare ecosystem, ensuring adequate protection against unforeseen medical expenses. *—PTI*

Garcia denies steroid use after positive test report

WASHINGTON, 2 MAY

Ryan Garcia has denied taking performance-enhancing steroids after testing positive for a banned substance before his win over Devin Haney. Sanctioning body the WBC confirmed it had "received notification" from the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association (Vada) that Garcia returned "adverse findings" in tests taken in April. ESPN has reported that it obtained a letter, external from Vada showing Garcia's positive result for ostarine. The samples were allegedly taken the day before and the day of his win over Haney in April, but the results came through afterwards. "Everybody knows that I don't cheat," Garcia, 25, wrote on X. "Never taken a steroid, I don't even know where to get steroids. I barely take supplements. Big lies, I beat him." He has 10 days to request for his B sample to be tested. Ostarine has been on the World Anti-Doping Agency's banned substance list since 2008. It is a selective androgen receptor modulator. ***—BBC***

Engineer Sanchez joins Alpine as technical director

WASHINGTON, 2 MAY

Leading engineer David Sanchez has joined Alpine as executive technical director a month after ending a short stint at McLaren. The Frenchman left McLaren just three months after joining from Ferrari. Sanchez was allowed to leave because he did not feel stretched in his role at McLaren, as its remit was smaller than he expected when he agreed to join. At Alpine, Sanchez will have overall responsibility for the performance, engineering, and aerodynamic areas of the team. He will report to team principal Bruno Famin. His appointment is an attempt to revitalise Alpine after a poor start to 2024 on the track - they are yet to score a point this season. ***—BBC News***

Bayern Munic players react after winning the first leg of semifinal against PSG on Thursday ***PHOTO:X/@BVB***

Leg 1: Fullkrug earns Dortmund 1-0 win

Around 82,000 fans were present in the stadium

DORTMUND, 2 MAY

Niclas Füllkrug scored and Borussia Dortmund earned a 1-0 win over Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal on Wednesday.

Dortmund defender Nico Schlotterbeck sent a long pass over the top for Füllkrug to control brilliantly with his first touch before firing it past PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma with his next in the 36th minute.

"It's not the first time that I've tried to stick the ball in at the near post this season. This time it worked out and I'm even happier that it's in such an important game," Füllkrug said. The win gives Dortmund a narrow advantage before the teams play again in the second leg in Paris next Tuesday, when the French champion will need to overturn the result if it's going to capture Europe's biggest prize before Kylian Mbappé leaves the club.

Dortmund's win ensured it qualified for the tournament next season and ait gives the Bundesliga five teams in the expanded tournament. Dortmund is assured of finishing at least fifth.

Roared on by most of the 81,365 fans present, including the famed "yellow wall" behind one of the goals, Dortmund made the busier start and maintained its intensity for the whole game. The home team ran 119.7 kilometres — almost 10 more than the visitors.

Defender Lucas Hernández went off injured after trying to stop Füllkrug from scoring. It looked like Hernández suffered a left leg injury. PSG pushed hardest early in the second half, when Mbappé hit the right post before Achraf Hakimi struck the left post.

"It would have been nice if we could have made our counter-attacks count to get a second goal at the end," Dortmund veteran Mats Hummels said. "But now we have to come through in Paris." The visitors missed chances, too. Ousmane Dembelé should have scored on his return to Dortmund when he blazed a shot over late, then Vitinha flashed a shot wide of the left post. *—AP*

Rohit explains rationale behind T20 WC selection

MUMBAI, 2 MAY

India captain Rohit Sharma on Thursday said the team management was crystal clear about picking as many as four spinners for the T20 World Cup in the Americas, asserting that IPL had very little role to play in deciding the final 15.

India have picked four spinners and three pacers in the squad, a move that has attracted diverse views. Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal are the two wrist spinners while Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel are the all-rounders who bowl left-arm spin.

"I don't want to go into details on this. I definitely wanted four spinners. We have played a lot of cricket there. The match starts at 10 am in the morning. There is technical aspect involved in this," Rohit said in a press conference to address queries on the squad selection here.

The India squad was picked on Tuesday and Rohit said a lot of attention was given to the team's needs in the middle overs. Dube was picked ahead of Singh and that too divided opinions. "We've got to understand what the pitches will be like and the opposition composition. One thing we really looked at is our middle overs hitting. Our top order hitting has been alright, it has not been bad. The captain added that the he had figured out 70 to 80 per cent of the squad before the IPL. *—PTI*

Indian cricket captain Rohit Sharma and BCCI Chief selector Ajit Agarkar address a press conference in Mumbai, on Thursday ***PHOTO: PTI***

'NO REPLACEMENT FOR WHAT PANDYA CAN DO'

MUMBAI, 2 MAY

Chief selector Ajit Agarkar on Thursday defended the selection of the under-fire Hardik Pandya in India's T20 World Cup squad, saying "there is no replacement for what he can do" when the flamboyant all-rounder is fit besides lending balance to the side.

He also admitted that excluding talented batter Rinku Singh from the final-15 was a tough call. "He has done nothing wrong, not even Shubman Gill for that matter. It is not his faul," Agarkar said. *—PTI*

Amul to sponsor USA and S Africa in T20 WC

NEW DELHI, 2 MAY

Indian dairy giant Amul will sponsor USA and South Africa during the T20 World Cup in June, the cricket boards of the respective teams announced on Thursday. The USA will be making their tournament debut as co-hosts of the tournament beginning 1 June. *—PTI*

India Women beat B'desh by 7 wickets

SYLHET, 2 MAY

A dominant India grabbed an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match women's T20I series as they pummelled Bangladesh by seven wickets in the third match here on Thursday.

After their skipper Harmanpreet Kaur opted to field first looking at the cloud cover and a mild breeze, India's bowlers dished out another disciplined performance to restrict Bangladesh to 117/8, which the visitors overhauled with nine balls to spare.

When they came to bat, openers Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Verma put on 91 runs in just 12.1 overs to take India closer to a series win. Shafali got out after a 38-ball 51, hitting eight fours, while Mandhana found form as she struck 47 off 42 balls with the help of five boundaries and a six.

Ritu Moni took a blinder off her bowling to dismiss Shafali while Nahida Akter accounted for Mandhana. But the damage was done. Earlier, the decision to bowl first did not yield the desired result immediately, as Bangladesh raced to 44 for no loss in the six powerplay overs. However, the Indian bowlers tightened the screws on the home team batters after the dismissal of Dilara Akter, who blazed away to 39 off 25 balls.

The hosts' brisk start was largely due to the batting of Dilara Akter who struck a few boundaries and negotiated the Indian bowlers without much difficulty early on at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. Trailing 0-2 in the five-match series, Bangladesh looked determined to give a better account of themselves and keep the rubber alive, two days after being shot out for 119 at the same venue. *—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

Time: 7.30 pm
Where To Watch: Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Wankhede Stadium

KKR look to iron out flaws against off-colour Mumbai

MUMBAI, 2 MAY

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) will look to iron out their flaws and get the better of a mis-firing Mumbai Indians when the two teams, placed on the opposite ends of IPL points table spectrum, clash here on Friday.

With six wins in nine games giving them 12 points and the second position in the IPL points table, a berth in the playoffs looks within the grasp of two-time winners KKR. But the Shreyas Iyer-led side will have to find consistency across departments and avoid any slip-ups in order to make it to the final four.

Each of their three losses have come in the last six games for KKR, who were at the receiving end of a record run chase by Punjab Kings but did well to bounce back with a seven-wicket thrashing of Delhi Capitals. Mitchell Starc has given nearly 12 runs an over while managing a mere seven wickets in eight outings. *—PTI*

ISL FINAL
STAGE SET FOR THE LAST FIGHT

Mohun Bagan SG, the reigning League Winners' Shield holders, will have a face off with Mumbai City FC, the runners-up of the league stage

MOHUN BAGAN

Total Matches: 22 | Won: 15 | Draw: 3 | Lost: 4 | Goals: 47

MUMBAI CITY FC

Total Matches: 22 | Won: 15 | Draw: 3 | Lost: 4 | Goals: 42

OVERALL HEAD-TO-HEAD

Total games played: 11 | MB: 5 | ODISHA FC: 2 | Draws: 4

Stadium: Salt Lake Stadium | **Time:** 7.30 pm
Where to watch: Jio Cinema

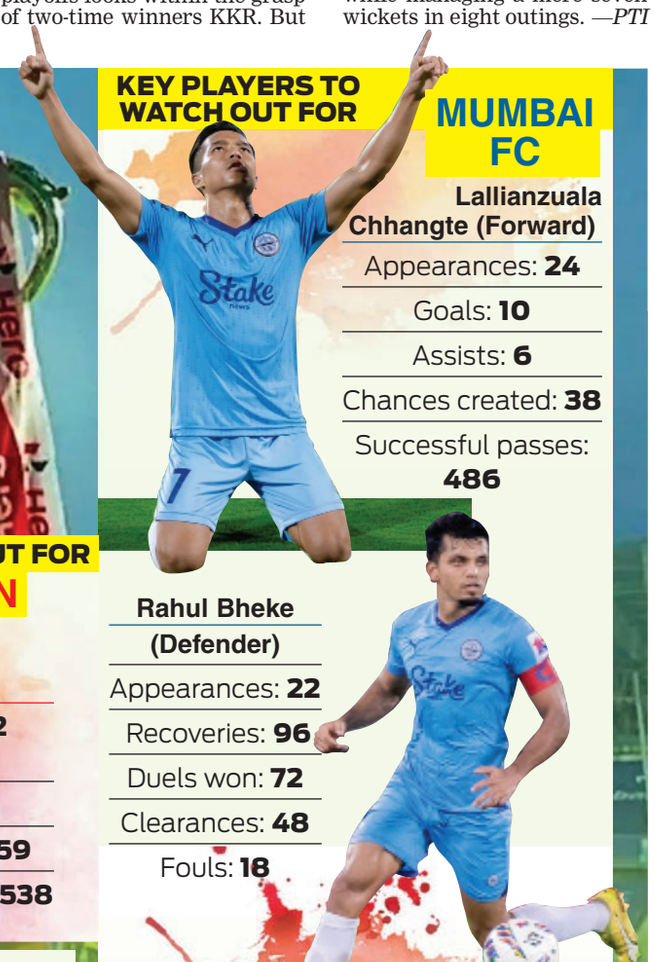
KEY PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR MOHUN BAGAN

Dimitri Petratos (Forward)
Appearances: **22**
Goals: **10**
Assists: **7**
Chances created: **59**
Successful passes: **538**

Jason Cummings (Forward)
Appearances: **22**
Goals: **11**
Assists: **2**
Chances created: **18**
Successful passes: **234**

Subhasish Bose (Defender)
Appearances: **24**
Recoveries: **125**
Duels won: **142**
Clearances: **76**
Fouls: **23**

KEY PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR MUMBAI FC



Lallianzuala Chhangte (Forward)
Appearances: **24**
Goals: **10**
Assists: **6**
Chances created: **38**
Successful passes: **486**

Rahul Bheke (Defender)
Appearances: **22**
Recoveries: **96**
Duels won: **72**
Clearances: **48**
Fouls: **18**

Jorge Pereyra Díaz (Forward)
Appearances: **16**
Goals: **9**
Passing accuracy: **75**
Chances created: **22**
Successful passes: **190**